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Golems and God

Mimesis and Confrontation

1. Introduction

Imagination is often giving expression to the needs, aspirations and problems of individuals. However, when articulated and disseminated, they may sometime crystallize similar views of others, and even influence them. The imaginary status of these mental constructs nonetheless becomes part and parcel of the factual world, or sometimes of what may be called history. Oftentimes, they are more powerful than many historical facts. Though belonging to the realm of the *imaginaire* a certain consistency is achieved by the act of committing to writing on the one hand, and by some inner logic characteristic of the *imaginaire*. When adopted into wider literary bodies, the structure of the *imaginaire* is impacted by problems of the larger, and often times more ordered, type of literature. This is what happened to the ancient *imaginaire* of artificial anthropoid: though it had appeared in the Talmudic literature which is rather non-constellated, it has been subsequently embedded into more articulated structures, adapting thus additional meanings.¹

The following discussions strive to illustrate the use of views regarding the Golem within the framework of two different trends in Jewish religious thought. On the one hand the propensity to imitate God, including the attempt to create anthropoids as part of this propensity and, on the other hand, the tension that emerges from such an attempt: its success may imply a potential usurpation of the unique status of God as the single creator of man. The later, emerging since early Middle Ages apparently under the impact of an external source found in Arabic, has been sometimes rejected by Jewish mystics and I shall pay special attention in the following sections to this topic. Thus, any understanding

of the constellation of ideas related to the Golem should take in consideration the appropriation of this topic for articulating quite different religious stands and the various undulations of its meanings those appropriations produced.

Like many other topics in Jewish thought, also the discussion of the Golem represents attempts to elaborate biblical issues, or sometimes only obscure terms. These elaborations are the result of both systemic developments within Judaism and of significant appropriations of modes of thought from the alien sources, which dramatically qualified and diversified the variety of Jewish treatments, and this more general statement has been already exemplified in connection with the constellation of ideas related to the Golem elsewhere.² Here an additional example to this complex situation will be adduced.

2. On the Creation of Man in the Book of Genesis

It has been duly noticed that creations of Golems, what I call anthropoids, represent forms of activities reminiscent, in one way or another, of the biblical accounts of the creation of Adam by God in the book of Genesis. However, it seems that the two accounts are nebulous enough, and despite the correctness of the assertion about the affinities between the two, I find it striking that it is still possible to detect in the biblical accounts points that need clarification before a significant comparison between the earlier and the later material should be entertained. Given the fact that the medieval masters who offered the numerous and divergent descriptions of the practice and meaning of the Golem, were steeped in the biblical material, I would like to present some points related to the biblical accounts before engaging in the medieval Golem theories. It goes without saying that I cannot enter here the wide range of Golem theories, which I have dealt with in detail elsewhere. I shall try here to raise some new points, striving to avoid unnecessary repetitions, and adducing some new material which escaped me in earlier analysis or were then unavailable.

From a reading of the first chapters of the Bible, the creation of man seems to be the most complicated operation in the ancient Israelite cosmology. While all the other entities were created by the divine words, in the case of man God is involved in a more intense manner: in the

¹ For a discussion of the *imaginaire* of the Golem in the context of what has been described as Hebrew imagination see Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture*. Routledge, London 1994, 53-61; Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish magical and mystical traditions on the artificial anthropoid*. SUNY Press, Albany 1990, 259-264.

² See Idel, *ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 86-91, 96-118.

verses 26-28 of the first chapter it is not only the image and likeness of God that are conferred upon man, but also the blessing God confers on the androgynic entity that evinces a special concern in this being. A creature which appears at the end of a process, man is also the peak of Israelite cosmology and he is destined, according to those verses, to reign over some of the preceding creatures. According to the other version of creation of man, found in ch. 2 verse 7, there are two different creative processes related to man: first the corporeal aspect is dealt with when God is creating him out of the dust, and then He infuses in his nostrils *Nishmat Hayyim*, the breath of life. It is this second operation that transforms the dust, apparently shaped in the form of man, into a *Nefesh Hayyah*, namely a living soul. Man emerges, therefore, as a mature being, who understands and speaks, and is able, later on in chapter 2, to call names to all the creatures. Thus, we may assume that by infusing the *Nishmat Hayyim*, it is not only the regular animal faculties that were included but also a spiritual faculty that is conceived of as much more advanced. Indeed, in verse 19 of the same chapter, it is said, and it is worth citing this famous passage, that:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them and whatever the man called every living creature [*Nefesh Hayyah*], that was its name.

Thus, the animals and the birds were already living creatures, just like Adam is described after the breath-infusion, before he called them names, and this calling constitutes another development. Indeed, according to the third significant discussion of the creation of Adam in the book of Genesis, in chapter 5:2 it is written: "male and female He created them and blessed them and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created." Thus, when man called the names, he did something that God did in relation to him. In other words, we may speak about a threefold operation: creation of the body out of dust, or the ground of the earth, the infusion of the living soul, and calling the name upon the animated being. However, while Adam was designated by this name immediately, with the animals and the birds it took some time before they received their names from Adam. It should be pointed out that the assumption that the names called forth by Adam adhere forever to the respective entity may point to an assumption that that names were linked to those creatures.

Indeed, it seems that God's calling names to all his creatures before the animals and the birds were created may be understood as the final touch, the completion of that creation. I would like to speculate about this discrepancy between the names given to Adam and all the mineral

creatures by God, while the animals were given names only later on: the creatures were subordinated to man according to the account of the first chapter, where God blesses Adam and nominates him to reign over the lower creatures. According to the second account, Adam is also calling names. Are not those two apparently different situations overlap, at least in part? May we assume that by calling names, someone is not only conferring a linguistic unit, but establishing a process of subordination, just as it was in the case of Adam and God? Is not the act of giving names creating the hierarchy between the caller and the called? By following this logic, God has a servant, called Adam, who takes care of His garden, while Adam is, at the same time, given some special status over the other living souls. By his transgression Adam lost part of this supremacy in coming closer to the animal realm, after he was quite close to God, and prone to become like one of "Us", *ke-'ehad mimmenu*, according to Genesis 3:22.

In fact, the difference between God and Adam is basically related to immortality: by eating from the tree of life, *'Etz ha-Hayy'*, Adam was prone to become immortal. Thus, we may conclude that according to the Hebrew Bible man was originally destined to be immortal, but because of his sin, the tree of knowledge, he lost this capacity, but he could nevertheless recuperate it by eating from the other tree, that of life. Instead, it is the achievement of immortality by means of reproduction that started its career immediately after the expulsion from the garden.

The threefold creation of man in Genesis should be compared to what I consider a threefold process described elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In his commentary to the book of Ezekiel, Moshe Greenberg drew attention to the parallelism between linguistic elements found the resurrection as described in chapter 37 of Ezekiel and the Genesis account of the creation of man in Genesis 2: the occurrence of the *ruah* and of the root *NPH*.³ I would stretch the significance of these two remarks as follows: there is a general parallelism between the vision of the dry bones, as prime-matter for the reception of the breath or spirit, and the two stages of creation in Genesis 2:7, and one more element found in Ezekiel 37:6,14-15 where a higher attainment than possessing the breath of life: the knowledge of God, is mentioned. I read the recurring expression *'Ani YHWH*, as the acknowledging the supreme divinity as the primary source ensuring resurrection, and in the previous

³ See his *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* by Moshe Greenberg, *The Anchor Bible*. Doubleday, New York 1997, 744. See also Shimon Levy, "Ezekiel, The Prophet as a Holy Actor", in: Nurit Yaari (Ed.), *On Interpretation in the Arts*. Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 2000, 69.

context, of the subordination of man to God. I am not sure whether the expression "I am the Lord" should not emphasize more the nominal aspect of the Tetragrammaton. Interestingly enough, later on in the same chapter, the assumption is that God will dwell within the people of Israel.

We may describe the pattern shared by those two biblical sources as follows: there are three main stages in creation of man: the corporeal, in which the body and its shape are created; the living soul, which stems from the spirit of God, a stage that may be described as "vital"; and a third stage, the nominal, in which the name of the creature is conferred upon a certain being. It would be pertinent to remark that insofar as the second stage is concerned, elsewhere in the Bible there is a request to the effect "Take not Thy spirit from me"⁴ which means that even the vital stage assumes an emanation from the divine spirit within man as long as he is alive.

Last but not least: another interesting verse seems to articulate an affinity between calling the name and creation: in Isaiah 43:1 it is written as follows: "But now thus says the Lord that created thee: O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by name thou are mine." Here the calling of name comes as a later stage of a process which commenced with creation and again it is connected to the human entity.⁵

Let me summarize this short analysis of the biblical accounts dealing with the creation of Adam: Adam did, to a small extent, imitate God when conferring names. Nevertheless, in the Bible he never becomes a rival of God because of this act of imitation. Man is allotted a certain role and function as part of a hierarchy in which God is safely at the top of the pyramid.

3. Power and Rivalry: Simon Magus Competes with God

What can be regularly conceived of as a magical operation may be understood not so much as an attempt to confront the divinity by the ac-

⁴ Psalm 51:13.

⁵ See Idel, *Golem*, XXVI; Edward Greenstein, "God's Golem: The Creation of the Human in Genesis 2," in: *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. Henning Graf Reventlow / Yair Hoffman (Eds.), Journal of the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 319, Sheffield Academy Press 2002, 220-239.

cumulation of an independent power and its independent activation, but an attempt to imitate Him by verifying the modus operandi and so testifying to the grandeur of the creator. Thus it is possible that in some Jewish texts, already beginning with the antiquity, magic and mysticism should be regarded as two faces of the same coin or two events that may be combined.

This deep affinity between religious categories which are often times described as significantly different is obvious in the Heikhalot literature, and it runs through some other types of literature up to the Renaissance, in the voluminous writings of R. Yohanan Alemanno and R. Abraham Yagel. In the case of the creation of the Golem, the practical implications of such an operation were never emphasized, up to the 17th century legends. Thus, we may conclude that most of the following texts, whose magical facet is obvious, insofar the technical aspect is concerned, are after all less interested in a practical goal. Thus, it seems that we can define the subject of the study as the magical component of mystical literature; the context of the appearance of these discussions mitigated the more practical possibilities inherent in this type of operation. While recognizing the sublimity and the superiority of the divine creator, the magician would strive to taste also the creative experience. It is quite plausible to understand some aspects of the creation of Golems as a sort of reproduction, by means of which the master is impressing upon matter spiritual forces that stem from his own psyche which might have been understood, eventually, as emanating from the divine realm. This creative attitude produced moments of frictions with the unequalled omnipotence of God. Greater is the human achievement in this domain, smaller the distance between him and God becomes. I would say that this tension between the practice of magic and God recurs in several discussions since the late antiquity until late Middle Ages, and they deserve detailed analyses.

It is not the aim of this presentation to deal with this issue but to exemplify it by resorting to an example from antiquity. In one of the earliest comparisons between a magician and the divine, the notorious ancient figure of Simon Magus reportedly boasted that

Once on a time, I, by my power, turning air into water, and water again into blood, and solidifying it into flesh, formed a new human creature – a boy – and produced a much nobler work than God the Creator. For He created a man from the earth, but I from air – a far more difficult matter; and again I unmade him and restored him into air, but not until I had placed his picture and image in my bed-chamber, as a proof and memorial of my work. Then we understood that he spake concerning that boy,

whose soul, after he had been slain by violence, he made use of those services which he requires.⁶

The term used for these transformations is *theiai tropai*, theurgical transformations. Scholem guessed that this phrase corresponds to the later instructions to create a Golem, with the difference that the medieval Jews used letters in lieu of air.⁷ This interpretation seems, however, to be incorrect; the medieval Golems were created by the transformation induced into earth, not only in the letters. For the Jewish masters, earth or dust played a similar role as air played in Simon Magus's account. Moreover, Simon is emphasizing his superiority over God when he describes his anthropoid as more sublime, because it was achieved by a transformation of something less concrete, air not earth, as in the biblical account. Thus, the *tropai* should be understood, as Simon says, as a process of gradual transformation of the more rarified element into a more solid one, so that the immaterial air becomes a body.

There are four elements that are mentioned: air, which turns into water, which turns into blood, which turns finally into flesh. We may assume, on the basis of Simon's description of the undoing, that the boy's body was destroyed by transforming flesh into blood, into water and finally back into air. This is a vision of creativity much closer to alchemy than to the Jewish theories of creating an artificial anthropoid. Interestingly enough Simon fails to mention the most characteristic of the Jewish versions of the technique of creating Golems: the combinations of letters or the uses of divine names. Unlike the dominant propensity for linguistic creations in Jewish material, his practice is quite naturalistic.⁸

In the same *Clementines Recognitiones* Simon has been reported as boasting that he "can render statues animated, so that those who see suppose that they are men."⁹ This is a totally different type of performance more reminiscent of the old Babylonian ceremony of inauguration and of the Hermetic type of magic that used statues in order to induce divine

⁶ *The Recognitions of Clement*, Book II ch. XV, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. VIII. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1951, 1. Compare also to *The Clementine Homilies*, *Homily II*, chapter XXVI, 233-234. On the possibility that the figure of Simon was reflected in the rabbinic Midrash see Hans Joachim Schoeps, "Simon Magus in der Haggada?" *HUCA* 21 (1948), 257-274.

⁷ See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Ralph Manheim (Tr.). Schocken Books, New York 1969, 172.

⁸ Compare to Scholem, *ibid.*, p. 172.

⁹ *The Recognitions of Clement*, Book II, ch. IX, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 99. Compare also *ibid.*, Book III, chapter XLVII, p. 126, *The Clementine Homilies*, *Homily II*, chapters XXXII, XXXIV p. 235, *Homily IV*, chapter IV p. 252.

powers into those statues in order to prophesy.¹⁰ It should be mentioned that a violent death, as found in the report of Simon's account, was conceived of as a way to prepare the soul of the murdered person to accomplish magical acts; such a stand is expressed several times in R. Yohanan Alemanno, who refers to the view of some magicians who indicated that by killing someone condemned to a death penalty when the murdered thought on a certain issue, his soul will continue to perform that issue, a fact that was used in order to manipulate the dead.¹¹

Last but not least in this context: Simon Magus's reported boasting should be understood against the broader background of the more famous claim of this figure, that he is *megale dynamis*: the great power: His self-perception as a divine power which descended in this world was not exceptional in his period as it has been pointed out by Morton Smith.¹² Simon created the boy not by means of his supreme wisdom or by possessing a special secret knowledge but, according to the passage, most eminently by the dint of his own power. The power is within Simon as an operator who possesses special attribute, while for most of the later Jewish mystics, the cardinal power is found more in the linguistic recipes someone receives. In the biblical accounts of creation the role of language is therefore prominent, either in the form of creative speeches in the first chapter of Genesis, or in the nominal stage of the creation of man, as described in the previous section; in the passage under discussion here the Gnostic magician neglects this aspects assuming to himself the power, in a manner that represents one of the most conspicuous instances of hubris.

¹⁰ See Brian P. Copenhaver (Tr.), *Hermetica*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, 89-90; *Asclepius*, par. 37-38; see Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*. Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge 1986, 143; Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago University Press, Chicago / London 1979, 35-37; Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*. The Warburg Institute, London 1958, 40, 68, 71. For the affinity between the magical aspects of the cult of causing the descent of Gods and the much earlier Egyptian similar cultic practices see Jan Assmann, *Ägypten, Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*. W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart / Berlin / Köln 1991, 50-53 and for Babylonian see more recently Christopher Walker & Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian Mis Pi Ritual*. State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts, vol. 1, *Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus*. Project, Helsinki 2001.

¹¹ Cf. his *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq*. Livorno 1840, fol. 43a, *idem, Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 2234, fol. 15a.

¹² See his "The Account of Simon Magus in Acts 8", in: *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume, English Section*. Jerusalem 1965, vol. II pp. 735-749.

4. The Apotheosis of *Sefer Yetzirah*

Simon Magus is, therefore, emphasizing much more the importance of power and his ability to control the elements, namely natural factors which are by definition exoteric issues, rather than the linguistic magic that is the core of the Jewish versions, some few of which we are going to survey below. Linguistic secrets are often times particularistic and esoteric. A magician, as he is portrayed by his very name, Simon Magus is more a predecessor of Paracelsus than of the Jewish authors who conceptualized the various models for the creation of Golems. From this point of view Simon fits the following description of Scholem, which is also based on the idea of power: "a man who creates a golem is in some sense competing with God's creation of Adam; in such an act the creative power of man enters into a relationship, whether of emulation or antagonism with the creative power of God."¹³

Though it is indubitable that concepts of power are important in rabbinic thought and in many forms of Kabbalah¹⁴ it seems to me highly significant that the most concentrated Rabbinic discussions of creativity related to matter and its shaping does not put in relief the centrality of the notion of power. Important for the point that we shall try to make here is the fact that it is wisdom, rather than power, that is promised to the student of the most important treatise used in order to create an anthropoid. According to a statement that is found at the end of some manuscripts of *Sefer Yetzirah*, it is written that whoever studies this book "his wisdom is beyond measure."¹⁵ There is little doubt that one of the major sources for the various descriptions of the Golem is *Sefer Yetzirah*: a short, compact and cryptic though highly influential book, its content resists, to a great extent, our understanding and the numerous efforts to elucidate its content testify to its enigmatic nature.¹⁶

¹³ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 159. More on this issue see below section 12. See also Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*. Mohr, Tuebingen 1985, 243.

¹⁴ See now the survey of the relevant bibliography and extended analyses in Jonathan Garb, *Power and Kavvanah in Kabbalah*. Ph. D. Thesis, Hebrew University 2000 (Hebrew).

¹⁵ See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 170. See R. Yehudah Barceloni, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah*. Solomon J. Halberstam, D. Kaufmann (Eds.). Mekize Nirdamim, Berlin 1885, 100, 268 (Hebrew).

¹⁶ I shall not adduce all the pertinent secondary literature on *Sefer Yetzirah* as it has been collected recently in Yehuda Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzirah*. Schocken, Tel Aviv 2000 (Hebrew).

Even the time and the place in which *Sefer Yetzirah* has been composed are a matter of sharp disagreements. Solely a cosmogonical book for some scholars,¹⁷ a more mystical though not devoid of magic for other¹⁸ or concerned with magic for other.¹⁹ However, what seems to me interesting in this book is the fact that the power of God is not the attribute that has been put in relief by the anonymous author: in a manner reminiscent of the Genesis report, it is language that plays a major role, though it now operates in a different manner: unlike the oral aspect of the biblical discussions, in *Sefer Yetzirah* it is the written, graven or hewn forms of the letters that play the principle role in the cosmogonic process. God is described as first creating the letters by hewing them from a primordial air, and then as combining them and thus creating the world. Therefore, a certain gnosis related to permuting letters in a technical manner that is relatively clear, plays the central role in this seminal book.

Unlike Simon Magus's reliance on his power and its apotheosis, it seems that some form of linguistic magic, whose efficacy lies outside the magician or God, plays now the prominent role. Given the fact that this special knowledge is transmitted in *Sefer Yetzirah* without any qualifying restrictions, the very resort to linguistic combinatory techniques is not perceived in the book as dangerous or interdicted or even as competing with God. On the contrary: at the end of the book Abraham is portrayed as imitating God by repeating the manner in which He created the world.

Decisive for some of the expansions of *Sefer Yetzirah* in the Middle Ages, which will be analyzed below, is the fact that Abraham is described as imitating God while alone, namely without the presence of any human companion. This solitary enterprise becomes a problem in a mode of religiosity in which the study, along with many other important religious activities, should be performed together with other Jews. On the other hand, the description of the creation of the anthropoid in the Talmudic literature speaks about the emergence of such an anthropoid as related to both one person, Rava, and to some magicians: *Havrayya*', and immediately afterwards the study of *Hilkhot Yetzirah*, the regulations of creation, or according to another version, *Sefer Yetzirah*, by two

¹⁷ Joseph Dan, "The Religious Meaning of *Sefer Yetzirah*." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993), 7-35. (Hebrew).

¹⁸ See Liebes, *Ars Poetica*, 67.

¹⁹ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 170; Paula E. Hyman, "Was God a Magician? *Sefer Yesirah* and Jewish Magic" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989), 225-237; Idel, *Golem*, 9-26 etc.; Liebes, *Ars Poetica*, 63-71.

scholars, R. Hanina and R. Hoshayah, who created and immediately consumed a calf, are mentioned.²⁰

Thus, we may speak about two different approaches found in late antiquity traditions concerning the creation of an anthropoid: the solitary theory, found at least in *Sefer Yetzirah* and in one account in the Talmudic discussion; according to the former one a single individual is studying the book in order to create, presumably an anthropoid, just as God did in the case of the creation. This view of solitary study of *Sefer Yetzirah* is still reverberating in several medieval sources, the earliest one being R. Yehudah Barceloni's commentary on this book.²¹

The second theory, starting with the mentioning of the Havrayya' in the Talmudic story, implies the need of a companion. I shall be concerned here basically with this second theory and some of its implications. In several texts that have been composed, as it has been surmised by scholars, around the 12th century, there is a tradition that describes God as creating by looking at *Sefer Yetzirah* and we shall deal with this topic immediately below. Unlike the description of *Sefer Yetzirah* itself, which only depicts God's creative activity without assuming that He contemplated a book which was already in existence, the traditions to be discussed below assume that God gazed to *Sefer Yetzirah* in a manner reminiscent of the Midrashic view which describes God as contemplating Torah as part of his creation of the world.²²

On the one hand, there is a lengthy quote preserved at the end of R. Yehudah Barceloni's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* and in a fuller form in several manuscripts dating from the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century, which will be translated in the next section. On the other hand, there is a passage printed by Adolph Jellinek as *Pesiqat Hadata'*, which he dated to the 12th century.²³ According to this version, God created the world by looking to *Sefer Yetzirah*, while the later figures, Abraham and Shem on the one hand, and Jeremiah and Ben Sira on the other, created a man by resorting to this book. This Midrashic source may be the source of the fuller discussion found in the manuscripts.

There are medieval sources of 13th century, all of them anonymous, which describe God as creating the world, and sometimes Adam, by *Sefer Yetzirah*, and His action being imitated by "historical" figures mentioned above. These sources, which were already pointed out by Gershom Scholem, consist in a quote in *Sefer Gematri'oth* stemming from the circle of R. Yehudah he-Hasid, the Pseudo-Sa'adiyah Commentary on *Sefer Yet-*

²⁰ See BT. *Sanhedrin*, fol. 67b; Idel, *Golem*, 29-30.

²¹ See *ibid.*, 100-101.

²² See *Genesis Rabba* 1:1, 2.

²³ See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 175-178.

zirah, and an anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on the Tetragrammaton.²⁴ Those slightly different texts share the assumption that God created not only the world but He also created Adam by using *Sefer Yetzirah*. The similarity between those texts can be explained either by referring to one of them as the source of the other, or by the hypothesis of an earlier, apparently lost version, which was close to the version to be adduced in the next section, but included also the detail of God's creating Adam in a special manner, as found in some other medieval texts.

5. The Late Midrash

In several manuscripts, relatively early ones, some copied in the eighties of the 13th century a lengthy text is extant, perhaps the longest one that deals with the creation of the Golem before the 20th century. I have edited elsewhere its Hebrew original from some manuscripts²⁵ and I bring here a translation of the salient points for my discussion, skipping some sentences that are not relevant:

By *Sefer Yetzirah* God created His world ... At the beginning, when He alone created the world, and the thought to create the world emerged He was strengthening the foundations of earth and it did not subsist until He created the Torah [and] *Sefer Yetzirah* and He gazed into it and understood its wisdom and He immediately created the world. His eyes were gazing in *Sefer Yetzirah* and His hands were roaming [Meshotetot] and building within the world ... like a man who builds a building and has a book and he contemplates it, so did the Holy One, blessed be He, when He created the world. And He finished it²⁶ and put it in the Torah ... And when Abraham was born ... he sat alone and meditated on it, but could understand nothing until a heavenly voice went forth and said to him: 'Are you trying to set yourself up as my equal? I am one and have created *Sefer Yetzirah* and studied it; but you by yourself [alone] cannot understand it. Therefore take a companion, and meditate on it together, and you will understand it.' Thereupon, Abraham went to his teacher Shem, the son of Noah, and sat with him for three years and they looked on it

²⁴ On those sources see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 178-181.

²⁵ See Idel, *Golem*. Translated by Azan Meir-Levi. Schocken, Tel Aviv / Jerusalem 1996, 271-275 (Hebrew version) and the pertinent footnotes, where a detailed account of the manuscripts in which the text is found has been provided. Let me emphasize that in those manuscripts, there is a paragraph at the beginning of the treatment, which has not been translated here, dealing with a series of titles of books, which seems to be a later addition.

²⁶ *Siyyimo*: The world or *Sefer Yetzirah*.

until they knew how to create a world. And to this day, there is no one who can understand it alone, two scholars [are needed], and even they understand it only after three years, whereupon they can make everything their heart desire.²⁷ Rava, too, wished to understand the book alone. Then Rabbi Zeira said to him: It is written:²⁸ 'A sword is upon the single, and they shall dote,' that is to say: a sword is upon the scholars who sit singly, each by himself, and concern themselves with the Torah. Let us then meet and busy ourselves with *Sefer Yetzirah*. And so they sat and meditated on it for three years and came to understand it. As they did so, a calf was created to them and they slaughtered it in order to celebrate their conclusion of the treatise.²⁹ And when they slaughtered it they forgot it. And they sat three years more [to study] it and it returned to them. Also Ben Sira wanted to understand it alone. And a voice emerged and said: 'The two are better than one'.³⁰ He went to Jeremiah and they studied it for three years and contemplated it and a man has been created to them. And on its forehead it was written: *YHWH 'Elohim 'Emmet*.³¹ And there was a knife in its hand and it was erasing the [letter] ,A[leph] of 'Emmet. Jeremiah said: 'Why did you do so?' He told them: 'I shall tell you a parable: There was someone who was a builder and [a] wise [man]. When people saw him they appointed him as their king. Later on, other people come and studied the profession: they [the people] deserted the first man and turned to the last. This is the case of the Holy One, Blessed be He, who gazed into *Sefer Yetzirah* and created the world, and all the creatures appointed Him as king. When you come and did as He has done, what is going to be the end? They will desert Him who created you and turn [instead] to you.' Then they told him: 'What should we do?' He said to them: 'Turn backward.' And [then] that man become dust and ashes.³²

This treatment is not only one of the longest discussion on the Golem as pointed out above, but also one of the most influential tradition whose traces can be found in a variety of 13th century texts dealing with the Golem, which are not related to each other. The date of this passage is still a matter of speculation: the *terminus ante quem* seems to be not later than the beginning of the 12th century, when a part of it has been quoted

²⁷ This is an explicit reference to attaining magical power.

²⁸ Jeremiah 50:36.

²⁹ This view is not accounted in Rabbinic literature, and seems to be a conflation with the Talmudic story of R. Hanina and R. Hoshayah who were reported to have created a calf.

³⁰ Ecclesiastes 4:9.

³¹ Cf. Jeremiah 10:10.

³² Ms. Parma-de Rossi 1390, fols. 92b-93a; R. Yehudah Barceloni, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah*, 268; on this text see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 175-177 and especially Yehuda Liebes, 'The Sin of Elisha'. Akademon, Jerusalem 1990, 133-137 (Hebrew); idem, *Ars Poetica*, 70-71.

verbatim by R. Yehudah Barzilai of Barcelona. The analysis of the entire text, done elsewhere, demonstrates that the text found in the manuscripts which includes the passage cited by Barceloni, is an organic text³³ whose main source seems to be *Pesiqeta' Hadata*. Since already R. Yehudah quotes a substantial part of this text, this passage demonstrates that the entire text translated above seems indeed to be part of a later layer of Midrashic literature, composed sometime between the eighth and eleventh centuries. It resorts to the form of the parable of a king which points to God, a literary strategy common in the Midrashic literature but it is uncommon in the Middle Ages. Moreover, its terminology does not include traces of philosophical or other medieval types of nomenclatures. It seems, therefore, that this is the first medieval legend describing the creation of an artificial anthropoid: while aware of the Talmudic story about the man created by Rava, it still differs substantially from the Talmudic discussion, resorting at the same time to *Sefer Yetzirah* as the main source of inspiration.

Indeed, according to this text, it is *Sefer Yetzirah* that underwent an apotheosis, as the book was conceived of as serving both God and man in their creative enterprises, not only describing those activities *post-factum*. It is the book as a clue for creativity that is emphasized not the power, or even the wisdom of man. Imagining a seminal book shared by God and man minimizes the possible conflict between the divine sheer omnipotence and the human attempt to imitate it. Interestingly enough, the passage describes God as involved in two different acts at the same time: contemplation of the book and the translation of the content of this contemplation in creating the world.

The artificially created man is presented here in a light that is rather unique until this period: the man is both speaking and intelligent. In fact it is the anthropoid who teaches Ben Sira and Jeremiah about the possible significance of their achievement, and how to undo it. Therefore, unlike the talmudic story in which the anthropoid is silent, here it is not only a speaking entity, but also an intelligent one, even capable to instruct the two accomplished scholars. The Golem teaches them that their achievement, because of its perfection, is prone to create confusion in masses and their perfect product becomes much more a problem for them than an attainment: They may be worshipped in lieu of their Creator. From the text, however, it seems clear that the masters themselves did not have in mind any form of competition with God. Their intention notwithstanding they might be the cause of the emergence of a false cult.

³³ See Idel, *ibid.*

Thus, the problem lays basically not with an intentional competition with the divine creativity, but with the possible reception by masses. The magical phenomenon itself is religiously dangerous not in its essence, but only in its public manifestations. From some points of view the situation described above is reminiscent of earlier traditions where even the creation of the outstanding Adam by God created a confusion, when angels were prone to worship Adam.³⁴

Again, it is not the fault of God, but the misunderstanding of the angels that is dangerous. The main technique mentioned here is related to the study of *Sefer Yetzirah*, which may be better understood as an ocular approach: gazing into the book rather than reciting it. Though the study might have been conceived of as implying oral activity, it seems that this aspect was not conceived to be crucial for the Midrash. To infer from the manner in which God has been portrayed as gazing and, at the same time, operating by His hands, we may conclude that also in the case of the two protagonists there is a possibility that a manual activity might have been involved in the emergence of the anthropoid. However, it seems that the act of collecting dust as a phase preceding the study and the operation with *Sefer Yetzirah* is not implied here. Crucial for the understanding of this version of creativity is the assumption that the book constitutes a paradigm or a blueprint for both world and man: in a manner reminiscent the Midrashic view that God created the world by looking into the book of the Torah, also here God and the Jewish masters looked into the details of a book, like an architect does in the case of his plan in order to materialize it. This is the reason why the parable about the builders serves so nicely the Golem's claim. The builders digested the power of creation found in the details of *Sefer Yetzirah* and automatically their study is a creative one, which generates various beings. Thus, a book or letters are the first source of creative power, when studied with a companion, unlike the legend about Simon Magus.

On the other hand, this late Midrash is imposing a Rabbinic theory on that of *Sefer Yetzirah*: Abraham alone could not understand *Sefer Yetzirah*, not to say to operate with it: he is portrayed as going to study with his master, and this is the case also with Ben Sira, who is studying with his father Jeremiah.³⁵ Thus the assumption is not a simple addition of someone to the process of studying, but in fact going to a superior

person: a master or a father and thus become part of a certain line of authority. The achievement of God as the single creator cannot be repeated by humans. Just as in the moment of creation of Adam, when some Midrashic sources assume that after God's creation there is no procreation without man and woman, here there is no creation of a Golem by a single person. At least implicitly, the association between two scholars is understood as creative, in a manner reminiscent of that of husband and wife. In any case, this emphasis on the need of two persons was taken over by R. Eleazar of Worms' discussion of the Golem.³⁶

However, despite the common study of *Sefer Yetzirah*, which apparently follows the very divine imperative and implies nothing like a competition with God, it is the Golem who speaks against its very creation. What God implicitly allows, the Golem explicitly forbids. In my opinion, this discrepancy between the earlier divine permission of studying *Sefer Yetzirah*, versus the later interdiction is the result of bringing together two different traditions stemming from different sources. The first one is stemming from a Jewish tradition which encouraged the study of the book, the second stemming, presumably from an Arabic tradition found in one of the most famous treatise of magic in Arabic: ibn Wahshiyya's *Nabatean Agriculture*, as it has been preserved in a 13th century Hebrew translation of a 9th century source:

Shem Tov ibn Falaquera wrote that he found, written in the "Book of Agriculture" that [a] in very ancient times one of the sorcerers made a man; he mentioned in his book how he made it and what he did so that his generation was complete. However, he acknowledged that the man he had made was not of the human species and could not talk or think. However, his limbs did come out perfect in their form. [The sorcerer] was astonished that [the man he had made] could not talk or think and that he took no nutrition, and [yet] survived a year. They said that the king prevented [the sorcerer] from engaging in making [another] man or animal, in order not to corrupt the faith of the masses; rather, he should strive to do some actions which would benefit the masses. He also mentioned that the man he has made would open and close his eyes; according to them it is possible to do this ... [b] They said that we see that a rat is born from the mud which decayed until it became black from the sun's shining on it; [the rat] became an animal capable of motion. They said that just as it is possible with animals, so is it possible with

³⁴ See Solomon A. Wertheimer (Ed.), *Batei Midrashot*. Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem 1952, II, 412; *Genesis Rabbah* 8:9, p. 63; Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), 225-226.

³⁵ For the relationship between those two figures in the Middle Ages see Eli Yassif, *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle Ages*. The Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1984, 17, 32-36 (Hebrew).

³⁶ See, e.g., *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*. Ms. Fishel, fol. 17b. It is quite clear that R. Eleazar's request of the minimum two persons for studying *Sefer Yetzirah* is dependent upon the late Midrash and not, as claimed by Peter Schaefer, (following Scholem though not mentioning him, *On the Kabbalah*, 178) as a reversal of Talmudic discussion in *Hagigah*. See his "The Magic of the Golem, The Early Development of the Golem Legend" *JJS* 46, 1-2 (1995), 260.

humans. It is also written there that there is a mountain in China on which is generated the form of a man with all of his limbs, and that people from those countries take the dust of that mountain and soak it in a hidden place until it becomes moist, [so that] the form of a living man, capable of motion, is generated from it. However, thereafter he only survives for a day or even less.³⁷

This quote has been preserved in its Hebrew form in the late 14th century Castilian Jewish thinker R. Shmuel ibn Zarza, who quoted a now lost commentary on the Bible by the mid-13th century Jewish philosopher, R. Shem Tov Falaquera. The latter, an expert in Arabic philosophy, had preserved much material that has been written originally in Arabic, because of his translations in Hebrew. Ibn Zarza himself was acquainted also with another text stemming from an Arabic source, as preserved by the Portuguese Jewish writer David ibn Bilya, dealing with a metallic anthropoid.³⁸

However, in our case, the Arabic book quoted in an abbreviated form is extant and available in print and demonstrates that Falaquera's summary is reliable.³⁹ In the 10th century an Arabic translation of presumably a much earlier book on magic, perhaps written originally in Greek, has been made by ibn Wahshiyyah and this book was available for at least two sources in the Middle Ages: Maimonides⁴⁰ and the Pseudo-Ibn Ezra's *Sefer ha-'Atzamim* whose precise sources and time of redaction are obscure.⁴¹ Thus, the above story reflects traditions that cannot be dated later than the 9th century. For the purpose of our discussion, a comparison between some of the details reflected in the above quote and some Golem traditions may be illuminating. Their similarities demonstrate that there is good reason to assume that at least some of the characteristics of the various Golem-epics precede their formulations as

³⁷ The Hebrew text and the English translation according to Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz, "Shem Tov Falaquera's Lost Bible Commentary" *HUCA* 64 (1933), 199-200.

³⁸ See Moshe Idel, "An astral-magical pneumatic anthropoid" *Incognita*, 2 (1991), 9-31. For other instances of Arabic discussion of creation of artificial life see Steven M. Wasserstrom, "The Challenge of Artificial Life: Medieval Jewish Responses from the Muslim World" *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 2000, 69-80.

³⁹ See *L'Agriculture Nabatéene, traduction en Arabe attribué a Abu Bakr Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Kasdani, connu sous le nom d'Ibn Wahshiyya*. Toufic Fahd (Ed.). Damask 1995, vol. II, 1318-1325. Thanks to Prof. Sara Stroumsa for her help to find the book.

⁴⁰ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* tr. Shlomo Pines. Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1963, 515, 518, 522, 542, 547, 548, 549, 559.

⁴¹ Menasseh Grossberg (Ed.), *Sefer ha-'Atzamim*. London 1901, 21.

found in European Jewish writers in the Middle Ages, and allows a much more complex description of the history of the Golem ideas.

Let me start with the fact that according to the *Nabatean Agriculture* the story about the creation of the artificial man is presented as an ancient one. Though the precise identity and the location of the story is not given in the Arabic version, I see no reason to deny the contention that the story may indeed be related to an ancient tradition. Such a tradition is testified by the story of Simon Magus, and the Talmudic story about the creation of the anthropoid attributed to the 'Amora Rava. When comparing these two stories with ibn Wahshiyya's passage, it becomes conspicuous that the Arabic book preserved a version closer to the Talmudic than to the Gnostic type of anthropoid. Especially similar is the mentioning of the creation of both an anthropoid and an animal. As I pointed out elsewhere, there are affinities also between the Golem traditions and a story preserved in Phaedrus' fables.⁴²

In any case the correspondence between the story of the builders and ibn Wahshiyyah's story may be explained in two ways: either the Arabic text has been influential on the late Midrash, and in this case the impact took place in the East, or both the late Midrash and ibn Wahshiyyah drew from a common earlier source which must be dated not earlier than the 9th century in the East. It is difficult to decide which of the two explanations is more plausible, but in any case it seems that if we accept the first, R. Yehudah Barceloni and thus his town, Barcelona, may constitute the starting point, or at least a main place which mediated material for all the versions which include the builders' story. Indeed, Barceloni's views were known in the Ashkenazi regions and may be the late Midrash in its fuller version reached the Ashkenazi masters via him. Indeed, the Pseudo-Sàadyah text explicitly quotes part of the above passage as a Midrash, as we shall see below. Moreover, it seems reasonable to assume that the oldest dated manuscript that includes this treatise was brought from Barcelona to Rome by R. Abraham Abulafia.⁴³ In any case, any serious attempt to attribute to early 13th century Ashkenazi figures the invention of the techniques related to the Golem should take in consideration these facts. Assuming as I do that the speech of the Golem is an addition that is different, indeed even contradicted the earlier part of the text, we shall be more acutely aware that the voice of the Golem differs from that of God, as the latter does explicitly permit the study of the book if it is done in a correct manner. Moreover, it is not only the study which is permitted but also magical

⁴² Idel, *Golem*, 4-5.

⁴³ See Moshe Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati, the Kabbalist*. Schocken, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem 1998, vol. I, 33-40 (Hebrew).

attainments as such are not criticized – the creation of a calf – but insofar as the creation of the artificial man is concerned. God is not afraid of the creation of a Golem and its implications for the status of religion; the Golem fears, however, those negative implications.

With this conclusion in mind let me analyze the most controversial part of the late Midrashic text: the quote from Jeremiah 10:10: *YHWH Elohim 'Emmet*: what does those words mean in the Bible and in the medieval passage? In the biblical context all those three words are divine names, which means that *'Emmet*, truth is a third divine name.⁴⁴ Scholem read the Midrashic play on *'Emmet/Met*, translating the later “God is dead” and so a precursor of Nietzsche’s famous formula, assumes that on the forehead of the Golem a sentence was found with God as the subject and *MeT* as a verbal form, just as he reads the first formula “God is truth”.⁴⁵

However, from the manner in which the reaction of the two operators is formulated, it is not the idea of the death of God that is transpiring: according to the parable, the first operator does not die when the others are substituting him, but is neglected. The death is, in my opinion quite explicitly, that of the creature. In the favor of the nominal reading of the two formulas let me adduce the insight of my friend Mr. Maurice Finkelson from Paris, who remarked in a conversation that the erasure of ‘aleph from *'Emmet* generates another noun, dead, in a manner reminiscent of the term *Aletheia* which means also truth, which is constructed from two constituents: *alpha* and *letheia*, the former functioning as the negation of the latter. I wonder whether this affinity may point out to a Greek background. Before passing to the reverberations of this tradition let me remark that it not only differs from the Ashkenazi techniques that had been studied elsewhere in its narrative, which uses an

client figures, but it neither addresses the issue of creating a figure out of dust, nor is the need for purity mentioned at all.⁴⁶

6. R. Yehudah he-Hasid and *Sefer Gematri'aot*

Late in the 12th century or early in the 13th century, several different theories and techniques dealing with artificial anthropoids were committed to writing in Northern Europe: Germany and France. Though sharing some features in common, they reflect traditions which had been differentiated by a long series of changes before they were committed to writing by the Hasidic masters. I had the opportunity to deal in detail with many of those traditions elsewhere.⁴⁷ Most of them are independent of the late Midrash and reflect another line of development that does not resort at all to Jeremiah and Ben Sira. Here I am concerned with aspects that were less highlighted in my earlier discussions. In a book that reflects traditions from the circle of R. Yehudah he-Hasid, one of the main founders of Ashkenazi Hasidism, a clear reverberation of the late Midrash dealt with above is found:

In *Sefer Yetzirah* ‘all’ is [done] by 231, combination of letters.⁴⁸ Likewise Ben Sira wanted to study *Sefer Yetzirah*. A [divine] voice exited and said: ‘You will not be able to do it alone.’ He went to Jeremiah his father, Ben Sira’ according to gematria’ amounts to Ben Jeremiyahu,⁴⁹ and they studied it and at the end of three years a man was created to them, on whose forehead it was written *'Emmet* like on the forehead of Adam. That [creature] they created told them: ‘If the Unique, Holy One Blessed be He, created Adam, [and] when he wanted to kill him He erased a letter from *'Emmet* and it was found Met, a fortiori I do want to do the same, and you should not create a man again, so that the people⁵⁰

⁴⁴ See *Pesher Habaquq* 8:9; Cf., Florentino Garcia Martinez & E. J. C. Tigchelaar (Eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Brill, Leiden 1998, I, p. 16. Though the reading of the Hebrew phrase *Niqra' 'al shem ha-'Emmet* I submit as “who was called in the name of Truth” is not attested in the translations or commentaries I am acquainted with, I hope to be able to elaborate on this proposal elsewhere. I assume that the translation of the phrase *shem ha-'Emmet* as “the name of truth” is erroneous. This is also the case later on in Arabic where the term *Haq* means both God and truth, as it is the case in the Samaritean thought. See Fossum, *The Name of God*, 156-157 note 231; See also BT. Sabbath, fol. 55a; Genesis Rabba 8:5, 60; See also Fossum, *ibid.*, 245-253; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 229 note 7; idem, *Ars Poetica*, 185; Idel, *Golem*, 4-5, 306-313. See also below, section 6.

⁴⁵ See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 180-181. See also Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 59.

⁴⁶ Compare the suggestion made by Peter Schaefer to see the beginning of the Golem legend in the claim of the Hasidei Ashkenaz for purity; see his “The Magic of the Golem” 259-261. Schaefer, who mentions R. Yehudah Barceloni, ignores the fuller version of the late Midrash as preserving material predating the Hasidei Ashkenaz, a fact that invalidates his theory. On alleged ‘beginnings’ in Jewish mysticism see below note 157.

⁴⁷ See Idel, *Golem*, 54-95.

⁴⁸ Namely of all two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

⁴⁹ Both those phrases amount to 323.

⁵⁰ *ha-'olam*.

will not hear as it happened in the generation of 'Enosh.'⁵¹ This is the reason why Jeremiah said: 'Cursed is he who trusts in man.'⁵² The created man told them: 'Turn the combination of letters backward and erase 'A[lef] of 'Emmet on my forehead.' And it immediately becomes ashes.⁵³

This is a concise form of the story discussed in the prior section. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is one major addition to it, consisting in the theory that God created not only the world but also Adam in a similar manner.

Let me address in some detail the claim that the term '*Emmet*' appeared on the forehead of Adam. Is this the addition of R. Yehudah he-Hasid or one of his students? I am not aware of any Rabbinic parallel to this statement to this effect. Has it, then, been invented by the Ashkenazi master in order to create a parallel motif to an already existing Golem story? I guess that not. A certain affinity between the creation of the world by God and *Sefer Yetzirah* on the one hand, and the letters '*Emmet*', on the other is found already in Rashi.⁵⁴ Moreover, according to some Rabbinic sources, Adam had lost some special features after his sin. The Rabbis enumerate six such loses none of which is, however, related to '*Emmet*'.⁵⁵ However, in an interesting parallel found in St. Ephrem the Syrian, (in whose writings there are plenty parallels to Jewish material), the list of the six lost issues consists in the crown, the name, the glory, the garment, the luminous robe, and the table of kingship.⁵⁶ Given the fact that this list includes things that are related to the body, and in the case of the crown it is a thing related to the head, it is possible that the lost name might have something to do with a name written, or found on the head, perhaps together with the crown, or eventually as part of the crown.⁵⁷

Interestingly enough, the Golem is presented here as performing some form of *imitatio dei* by destroying itself, while the mimetic per-

⁵¹ For the question of the sin of Enosh see Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation*. Scholar Press, California 1984, 141, 166.

⁵² Jeremiah 17:7.

⁵³ *Sefer Gematri'aot*. D. Abrams (Ed.), Cherub Press, Los Angeles 1998, 188; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 179.

⁵⁴ See Liebes, *Ars Poetica*, 63-64.

⁵⁵ See Genesis Rabba, ch. XII:6, 101-102.

⁵⁶ See Nicolas Sed, "Les hymnes sur le paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions juives" *Le Museon* 81 (1968), 474-475; On other affinities between Ephrem and Jewish esotericism see *ibid.*, *passim*, and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path*. SUNY Press, Albany 1995, 193 note 17; 195-196 note 23.

⁵⁷ See Fossum, *The Name of God*, 99-101.

formance of men are conceived of as creative. R. Yehudah he-Hasid was presumably very much concerned with traditions related to artificial anthropoids. If we accept a later tradition dealing with his father, R. Shmuel he-Hasid's creation of a golem, this seems to be something as a family predilection.⁵⁸ Scholem has drawn attention to yet another tradition attributed to him, which does not concern us here.⁵⁹ Let me address another tradition dealing with this topic and compare it to *Sefer ha-Gematri'aot*. It is found in a book entitled *Sefer ha-Tagi*, and it might have been written, as suggested by J. Dan, by R. Yehudah himself⁶⁰ or by one of his immediate followers:

When I desire then man is [namely should be] 'in the image of 'Elohim',⁶¹ when I desire 'Their image should be despised in the town.'⁶² When I shall desire I shall revive him in our likeness, this is Samson in his strength, and the inverse at the end namely when he did transgress my will, He took his strength. Likewise is Adam when he did perform His will *Gilgul ha-'Olam*⁶³ and was not stricken and his stature is great, and when he transgressed, He removed him from his stature in our likeness, complete like it is above, having richness and honor and wisdom. But when he transgressed He removed Adam from all these [qualities] and this is the reason why [the letter] N[un] is inverted. And He wanted to give fifty gates of understanding to Adam,⁶⁴ but since He has foreseen that they will sin He took from them a little bit.⁶⁵ In his image [means] the skin of the face of Moses, like in our likeness. In the future, the righteous will cause the resurrection of the dead, [like] Elijah, Elisha [and] Ezekiel as it is written 'The seal [*Hotam*] will be changed into clay'.⁶⁶ This is the rationale for the inverted n[un] in [the word] *Na`aseh*.⁶⁷ Why

⁵⁸ See Idel, *Golem* (Hebrew version), 276-277.

⁵⁹ See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 181 note 1.

⁶⁰ See Joseph Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature*, (Massadah, Ramat Gan 1975), 134-148 (Hebrew).

⁶¹ Genesis 1:26.

⁶² Psalms 73:20.

⁶³ This Hebrew syntagma has no sense, as it means the revolution of the world. Perhaps the correct version is *Godel ha-'Olam*, the size of the world, namely the stature of man was as great as the world a view found in Rabbinic thought. See the texts of Genesis Rabba 24:2, p. 230; 14:8, p. 132, cited by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 163; Susan Niditch, "The Cosmic Adam: Man as Mediator in Rabbinic Literature" *JJS* 34 (1983), 137-146. See also Idel, "Enoch is Metatron", 225-226; Fossum, *The Name of God*, 272-273.

⁶⁴ This is a leitmotiv in R. Eleazar of Worms' writings.

⁶⁵ Namely God took one of the gates so that what remained are forty-nine gates of wisdom, as in Rabbinic literature.

⁶⁶ Job 38:14.

⁶⁷ This assumption that the letter nun in the word *na`aseh* is not met by any other traditional source I am acquainted with.

it is not written *Ma`aseh* [deed]? Because it [the verse] hints at the righteous who know how to create by means of the combination of letters, and they created a man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah* but he was not similar to the man created by God in His wisdom, and this is the reason of [the inverted] Nun. This is the reason why if he will sin, he [apparently the Golem] will return to the dust, namely the inversion of *Na`aseh*.⁶⁸

Prima facie the two passage adduced in this section and related to R. Yehudah seem to share nothing. Nevertheless, there is something in common: would the righteous not sin, the anthropoid he has created would not return to dust. Thus, the implicit assumption is, like in the Ben Sira' version, that the created anthropoid may, in principle, be immortal. Moreover, there is an implicit comparison between the artificial man and Adam, which assumes that the former is inferior to the latter. Different as they are, they have nevertheless been compared. Let me address now the phrase: "the righteous [Tzaddiqim] created a man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*."

This sentence does not reflect the Talmudic discussion where *Sefer Yetzirah* is mentioned in connection to the creation of a calf not to an anthropoid. Neither is this statement reflecting *Sefer Yetzirah* where it is only one person who is creating, namely Abraham. Thus, what remains is to see in this statement an impact of the late Midrash, where Jeremiah and Ben Sira have been described as creating a man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*.⁶⁹ Thus, a late 12th century or early 13th century Ashkenazi text is already influenced by the late Midrash on a central point related to the creation of the artificial man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*, a fact that strengthens the affinity between the quote we adduced above from *Sefer ha-Gematria'ot* and R. Yehudah he-Hasid. Moreover, according to a passage in R. Eleazar of Worms' *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, Abraham and Shem were described as studying together *Sefer Yetzirah*, again a view that betrays the impact of the late Midrash or of *Pesiqeta' Hadata'*.⁷⁰ In any case, the passage from R. Eleazar demonstrates that our suggestion about the source of *Sefer Tagi* is quite a possible proposal. The creation of man by wisdom, when it appears in the context of a seal is reminiscent of the verse from Ezekiel 28:12, "Son of man... you are a seal and a paragon, full of wisdom." This verse is found in R. Eleazar of Worms' Commentary on the Pentateuch, together with the verse from Genesis 2:7, whose acronyms constitute also *Hotam*.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1566, fol. 243a. See also Idel, *Golem*, 59-60.

⁶⁹ See also below, section 6.

⁷⁰ Benei Beraq 1987, 23.

⁷¹ Yoel Klugmann (Ed.), (Benei Beraq 1986), I, p. 78 note 57.

7. Pseudo-Sa`adya's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*

Sometime at the beginning of the second part of the 13th century, probably in Northern France, a Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* has been composed in a group which has been designated by Joseph Dan as the Circle of the Special Kerub.⁷²

As it is said in the Midrash, that Jeremiah and Ben Sira have created a man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah* and on his forehead it was written 'Emmet just as the name of God which was pronounced on the Formation, [Yetzirah] [in the verse] "as 'Elohim created and performed."⁷³ And this man was erasing the 'Aleph, namely the Holy, Blessed be He is alone, and Man⁷⁴ had to die for the sake of the man whom they created by means of the name of God, and there is no one besides Him.⁷⁵

Let me start with a philological observation. Following Scholem, I translate the Hebrew phrase *be-shem ha-Shem*, "as the name of God" reading the first words *be-shem* as *ke-shem*, a very small change in medieval calligraphy, and the second word, *ha-Shem*, which may stand for both name and God, as God.⁷⁶ I preferred the latter possibility since it reflects the view of 'Emmet as a divine name as it has been discussed above. In any case the form 'Emmet *be-shem ha-shem* is difficult and the German translation of Necker, "Wahrheit, geschrieben mit den Namen Gottes," "Truth, with the name of God"⁷⁷ is possible though not so plausible. Indeed, as Necker himself has correctly pointed out, 'Emmet is emerging as an acronym of the consonants of the Hebrew words found in Genesis 2:3.⁷⁸ Therefore, 'Emmet is the name God pronounced, according to this text, "over the formation" when it has been completed.

⁷² See now the collection of his articles on this topic: Joseph Dan, *The 'Unique Cherub' Circle: A School of Jewish Mystics and Esoterics in Medieval Germany*. Mohr, Tübingen 1999. Dan still believes that this circle was active in Germany, though all the extant evidence point to Northern France. He was unaware of the following studies: Idel, *Golem*, pp. 81-95; Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Peering through the Lattices." *Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2000, 135, 171-172, 206.

⁷³ Genesis 2:3. This verse is conceived of as the end of the cosmogonic process.

⁷⁴ The following sentence is difficult and I propose to understand it in accordance to the reconstruction proposed in the following section.

⁷⁵ Cf. the text printed by Gerold Necker, "Warnung vor der Schöpfermacht, Die Reflexion der Golem-Tradition in der Vorrede des Pseudo-Sa`adya Kommentar zum *Sefer Yesira*" *Frankfurter Jüdische Beiträge* 21 (1994), 67.

⁷⁶ See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 179. Scholem and Necker, however, stand shy of explicitly identifying 'Emmet as a name of God.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 53, 61 note 98.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 62.

Let me adduce in this context an early 15th century text, written by an Ashkenazi author R. Shimshon ben Shmuel:

It is known that whoever is expert in *Sefer Yetzirah*, is able to operate operations by the holy names, and out of the elements, dust of a virgin soil and water, a body [Golem] and form will emerge, which has a vitality and even so it is called dead [met] since he cannot confer to it knowledge of divine issues and speech, since ‘the knowledge and the speech are [the prerogative of] the Life of the Worlds’,⁷⁹ but the Holy, Blessed be He, has sealed man, [by the sign of] ‘eMeT, which is hinted at in the verse ‘And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life’,⁸⁰ the endletters of these words being *Hotam* [seal] since man was the seal of the Formation in the Account of Creation, and His seal is the creation of man. And this is said in the verse⁸¹ ‘God has created and performed’.⁸²

What is fascinating in this passage is the fact that it brings together, or reflects an earlier tradition, in which the verse from Genesis 2:3 interpreted as dealing with ‘Emmet, and found in the Pseudo-Sa`adya’s text, and the verse Genesis 2:7, dealing with the *hotam*, seal, a topic found in *Sefer ha-Tagi*. Now, this nexus which appears in the last quote is even more interesting if we become aware of the existence of a Talmudic statement which assesses that ‘The seal of God is truth’.⁸³

8. A Kabbalistic Transformation

Sometimes at the mid-13th century, a group of Kabbalists whose identity is unknown, created a small literary corpus composed of more than twenty short treatises known as the literature of the circle of the Book of Speculation.⁸⁴ In one of those short treatises, entitled *The Commentary on the Tetragrammaton*, the anonymous Kabbalist writes:

This [divine] name is unknown and incomprehensible but by the thought, and it is not comprehended but by five things, which are *Tiqqun* and

⁷⁹ *Hay ha-'Olamim*, a designation for God in rabbinic literature and in a poem interpreted by R. Eleazar of Worms and copied by this author. See Idel, *Golem*, 66.

⁸⁰ Genesis 2:7.

⁸¹ Genesis 2:3.

⁸² *Sefer Hadrat Qodesh*. Warsaw 1910, fol. 2a; Idel, *Golem*, 65-66.

⁸³ BT, *Sabbat*, fol. 55a.

⁸⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Allan Arkush (Tr.), R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Ed.). JPS Philadelphia and Princeton University Press 1987, 309-364; Mark Verman, *The Book of Contemplation, Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources*. SUNY Press, Albany 1992; Idel, *Golem*, 77-78 note 73.

Tzeruf and *Ma'amar* and *Mikhhol* and *Heshbon*. *Tiqqun* [proper order], is to know the name from its beginning to its end, as it is written. *Tzeruf* is when you combine it with the twenty-two alphabets of *Sefer Yetzirah*; and you shall know how to make from each and every combination [*tzeruf*], a *Ma'amar* and afterwards to comprise [*Likhhol*] all of them together, which is the meaning of *Mikhhol*. Afterwards [you] have to know the calculation so as not to err when you join the letters and their vowels. All these things are comprised in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and this is the reason why the *Sag es* opened with LB,⁸⁶ and it is the essence of the written Torah as we said B of *Bereshit* L of Israel.⁸⁷ And on this issue the Torah said⁸⁸ ‘Man cannot know its order,⁸⁹ not is it found in the earth of living.’ On this the Sages, Blessed be their memory, said: ‘Would man know its order, he could create worlds like the Holy, Blessed be He’.⁹⁰ We found in *Sefer ha-Bittahon* written by R. Yehudah [ben Bateirah] that Jeremiah, blessed be his memory, was studying *Sefer Yetzirah* alone. A voice came out and said to him: ‘Take a companion.’ He went to Sira his son and they studied [together] for three years in order to accomplish what was written⁹¹ ‘Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with the other.’ At the end of the three years, when they wanted to combine the alphabets, according to the combination,⁹³ to the *Mikhhol* and to the *Ma'amar*, a man was created and on his forehead it was written the *YHVH Elohim eMeT*. In the hand of that man there was a knife, and he was erasing the ‘e of the word ‘eMeT and remained *MeT*. Jeremiah rent his garment and said to him: ‘Why did you erase the ‘e of ‘eMeT?’ He answered him: ‘I will tell you a parable: An architect built many houses, cities and squares but no one should copy his art and compete with him in knowledge and skill until two men persuaded him. Then he taught them the secret of his art and they knew how to do everything in the right way. When they learned his secret and his abilities, they began to anger him with words. Finally they broke with him and became architects like him, except that what he charged a thaler for, they did for six groats. When people noticed this they ceased to honor the architect and came to them and honored them and gave them commissions when they required to have something built. So God has made you in his image likeness and form. Now, when you created a man like Him, the people will say that there is no God in the world but you. Jeremiah told him: ‘If so, how can we repair it?’⁹⁴ He answered

⁸⁶ *Sefer Yetzirah*.

⁸⁷ These are the first and the last letters of the Pentateuch, which means that LB – heart – comprise the entire Torah.

⁸⁸ Job 28:13.

⁸⁹ ‘Erkkah. literally, value or price.

⁹⁰ See *Midrash Tehillim*. Salomon Buber (Ed.), 33; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 37; Liebes, *Ars Poetica*, 64.

⁹¹ Malakhi 3:16.

⁹² *Tzeruf*.

⁹³ Jeremiah 10:10.

⁹⁴ Ma'y Taqanateih?

them: 'Write the letters backwards on the dust that was thrown, by the intention of your heart and don't think about the way of [its] honor or of its order [*Tiqquno*] but do all this backwards. And they also did so and that man became before their eyes, dust and ashes. Then, Jeremiah said: 'Indeed it is worthwhile to study these matters for the sake of knowing the power and *dynamis* of the creator of the world, but not in order to [actually] do [them] but you shall study them in order to comprehend and teach'.⁸⁵

There are many and important parallels between the 13th century Kabbalistic treatise on the divine name and the late Midrash, to which I shall return in a while. Let me, however, point out first the differences between them. One is the fact that the anonymous Kabbalist mentions God's creation of man by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*, while the late Midrash mentions the creation of the world. This is by no means a small divergence. While the Midrash is much closer to the opening of *Sefer Yetzirah*, which deals with the creation of the world, it is only later, when dealing with Abraham's study of the book, that the creation of man by resorting to this book is mentioned. Thus, while the late Midrash does not attribute the creation of Adam to *Sefer Yetzirah* at all, this is nevertheless the case also in *Sefer Gematri'aot*.

My assumption is that those versions are not different and independent traditions, but they originate in one earlier version which included elements found in the different versions and it is possible that we should recombine them in order to understand better the more comprehensive view that generated both versions. According to such a hypothetical more comprehensive text, God created the world by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*. Then he created Adam in the same manner, and Adam emerged as a being upon whose forehead the term 'Emmet has been written, and He had to erase the letter 'Aleph in order to destroy him. Then Abraham created a Golem, and so too Jeremiah and Ben Sira. The Golem told the story about the king's interdiction and initiated them in the technique of destroying it. What is interesting in the reconstructed narrative is the fact that it combines elements that are shared by the two versions in such a manner that complements the themes that miss in the other version. Indeed, the second version includes not only the imperative to destroy the

Golem and the technique to do so, but also provides the existence of a divine model for the act of annihilation.

Accordingly, the human magicians are successful because they are able to generate an anthropoid by their mastering the same book that served as the handbook of the divine creation of Adam. However, they were not the best students of this book, which includes the principle that good or bad is a matter of the order of the letters of a certain word, as it is exemplified in *Sefer Yetzirah* by the play on the order of the letters NG` – plague as 'NG – delight. However, the deficiency implied in the ignorance of the technique of undoing is 'repaired' by the Golem's story, and at the end Jeremiah and Ben Sira' not only did create the Golem but also undid it, just as God did to Adam. In other words, ultimately there is no significant difference between the human and the divine acts. It seems to me that in this context the obscure statement that is found at the end of our quote from the Pseudo-Sa`adya's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* quoted in the previous section, may make some sense: it puts together explicitly the creation and destruction of Adam with that of the Golem as following the same pattern, putting both in a category that is different from God.⁹⁵

Let me turn to the question of the status of the entire project of creating a Golem. The anonymous Kabbalist is capitalizing on a rabbinic statement dealing with magical issues, not related to the Golem: magic should be studied but not put in practice.⁹⁶ I see this resort as an attempt to harmonize between the voice of God, which allows the study and implicitly its result, and the voice of the Golem, which interdicts it. By adopting the Rabbinic formula the theoretical study is permitted while its practice is forbidden. The same Rabbinic warning occurs also in other discussions of the creation of the Golem in the Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* of R. Meir ibn Avi Sahulah,⁹⁷ and in a passage written by, or at least very close to Abraham Abulafia. After describing in detail the technique for creating an artificial man the author wrote as follows:

And [then] a likeness [demut] will emerge ... and it is forbidden to do like the deed of the Creator, and you shall not study it in order to perform it, but you shall study it in order to understand and to teach and to cleave to the great name of God, praised be He.⁹⁸

⁸⁵ Ms. New York, JTS 1887, fol. 7b; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 180-181. This text has been paraphrased, as pointed out by Scholem, by Johannes Reuchlin in his *De Arte cabalistica*; see Idel, *Golem*, 177-179. The text had been paraphrased in the widespread Kabbalistic book entitled *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*. For a late 15th century Latin translation of this text, which could have an impact on some Christian authors in Italy see now Franco Bachelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone Da Spoleto, Tra filosofia dell'amore e tradizione cabalistica*. Leo S. Olschki (Ed.). Firenze 2002, 15, 31.

⁹⁵ Compare however to Necker, "Warnung vor der Schöpfermacht", 53-54, who did not address the issue of Adam at all.

⁹⁶ See BT, 'Avodah Zarah, fol. 17a; BT, Sanhedrin, fol. 65a, Rashi on Deuteronomy 18:9 and Maimonides, Commentary on the *Mishnah Pesahim*, chapter IV.

⁹⁷ Ms. Roma-Angelica 45, fol. 2a.

⁹⁸ Tehilat ha-Yetzirah, cf. Idel, *Golem*, 97-98.

This quite explicit warning notwithstanding the entire passage that precedes the warning explains in detail how to create a Golem and reach the experience of the *demut*, in a manner reminiscent of Abraham Abulafia's mystical technique and experience presented as seen a human imaginary image.⁹⁹ This sharp discrepancy between the details of the practice represented in the first and longest part of the discussion, and the much shorter theoretical interdiction is quite fascinating. It is reminiscent of the problem we discussed in this section: the undulation between the two opposite poles is clear also in Abulafia's passage. As I argued elsewhere, it is plausible that Abulafia brought to Italy, apparently from Barcelona, a copy of the late Midrashic text that I translated above, though it seems that he was also acquainted with the last part of the *Commentary on the Tetragrammaton*, from the *Yuun* literature.¹⁰⁰

Another important addition found in this anonymous Kabbalistic passage is the introduction of a rather detailed technique in the framework of the late Midrashic text. This is also the case in Abulafia's *Tehilat ha-Yetzirah*, though the details of the technique are substantially different. Those techniques, dealing with divine names, represent elaborations that function as the conferring the name to Adam when created in the Bible. This is true also in other cases dealing with the Golem, especially those formulated in the Ashkenazi circles. However, unlike most of the Ashkenazi recipes, assembling dust and shaping an anthropomorphic figure are not mentioned in the *Commentary on the Tetragrammaton* though some form of using dust is found also in Abulafia's *Tehilat ha-Yetzirah*. Therefore, the Kabbalistic anonymous text, which had a significant impact on both Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, has sources which do not depend upon the Ashkenazi traditions.

Let me note at the end that in all those versions which include the interdiction of creating an anthropoid, there are also other voices which implicitly and explicitly point in another direction. Thus, the legends of the Golem, which survived in many medieval and premodern sources, did not "listen" to the voice of the Golem, but to other voices found in the earlier texts, and no simplistic understanding of an anti-magical message of those texts should be adopted.¹⁰¹ Distinguishing the different voices and tracing their various sources, and become more aware of the dialogue between them will not silence one of them in the favor of the other.

⁹⁹ See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*. Jonathan Chipman (Tr.). SUNY Press, Albany 1987, 95-100.

¹⁰⁰ See above, note 43.

¹⁰¹ Compare Necker, "Warnung vor der Schöpfermacht".

9. R. Nathan ben Sa`adyah Harar

To be sure, in other discussions apparently later ones, Abulafia decided, and so also some of his followers, in the direction of a spiritual Golem which may be understood as the creation of the alter ego which reveals itself to the operator. This experience was induced, as mentioned above, by resorting to techniques which are identical to that employed for creating the Golem. Thus, a spiritualization of this topic as if dealing with a mystical experience took place and I would like not to repeat the discussions on this topic.

The most complex elaboration on the Golem version in which Ben Sira and Jeremiah are the main protagonists is found in a lengthy passage of R. Isaac of Acre that will be dealt with in the next section. However, in order to understand better the claim of R. Isaac, let me adduce some discussions on the Golem found in the writings of a Kabbalist who certainly influenced R. Isaac. It is R. Nathan ben Sa`adya Harar, a Kabbalist who flowered at the end of the 13th century in Messina, Sicily, where he studied with Abraham Abulafia. Presumably, later on in his career, he visited also the land of Israel, and dealt several times with the issue of the Golem. This is part of the special interest in this topic in the school of ecstatic Kabbalah.¹⁰² He was quoted by R. Isaac of Acre, who in my opinion was the former's student, as follows:

And if she [the soul] will merit to cleave to the Divine Intellect, happy is she, since she returned to her source and root, and she is called, literally, Divine Intellect. And that person is called the Man of God, that is to say, a Divine Man, creating worlds. Behold Rava created a man, but did not yet merit to give him a speaking soul. And you have to understand that since the soul of man has reached a degree of the supernal degrees, his soul governs everything bellow this degree, and there is no need to elaborate upon this issue which is an axiom for every learned person.¹⁰³

It is reasonable to assume that introducing the case of Rava's creation of man serves as an example of a degree that can be transcended by certain persons, the Divine Men, who are able to rule over everything inferior to this degree, by cleaving to the highest degree. This reading is corroborated by the word "yet" `Adaiyn which implies the possibility to surpass the achievement of the Talmudic master. If so, the man of God or the Divine Man can, at least implicitly according to this passage, induce a speaking soul into the Golem, provided his union to the Divine

¹⁰² See Idel, *Golem*, 106-108. On this author see now Natan ben Sa`adyah Har`ar, *Le Porte della Giustizia, a Cura di Moshe Idel*. Maurizio Motolese (Tr.). Adelphi, Milano 2001, especially 109, 111, 133, 184, 249.

¹⁰³ *Me'irat `Einayim*, 223.

Intellect. A perfect Golem may, therefore, be created by a perfect man who is in a state of perfect mystical union, namely in a state of union with the Divine Intellect. According to this passage, and following the Talmudic discussion in Sanhedrin, the perfect man, like the rabbinic Tzaddiqim, is capable of creating not only an anthropoid but also worlds. However, it should be pointed out that R. Nathan himself was not interested in magical performance though he was aware of this aspect of Kabbalah.¹⁰⁴ The paramount importance of the contact between the mystic and the divine intellect is reminiscent of a view of Abraham Abulafia that the process of creating a creature is preceded by the reception of the influx of wisdom.¹⁰⁵ In both cases the intellectual perfection is considered as a prerequisite for the creative process and we shall return to this issue below.

Let me discuss another instance that requires the union with the divine as preceding the creation of an artificial man. At the beginning of the 14th century, an anonymous commentator on the Bahir passage on Rava's creation of the anthropoid in the Talmud, wrote that: "They [the righteous] created the world": the explanation is that they were creating worlds since [or after] they cleaved to God, namely to the [attribute of] Righteousness, [which is] the foundation of the world."¹⁰⁶ I assume that the Kabbalist understands the powers that the operators achieve as the result of the cleaving of the human righteous to the supernal Righteous, the *sefirah of Yesod*. This power is related to the world, either as its foundation or, by this dint, to its governing.

10. R. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre

Let me address now a most important text written by R. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, one of the most interesting Kabbalists at the turn of the 13th century. The following passage consists in a discussion which took place during a seminary which reflects, in my opinion, a Kabbalistic trend different from the 'Iyun circle discussed above, though it refers to it. R. Isaac of Acre was part, at least for a certain period, from a group related to ecstatic Kabbalah and was influenced by some of its view. Indeed, in this school we may find a greater interest in the tradition of the

¹⁰⁴ See Idel, *Natan ben Sa'adyah*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ See Idel, *Golem*, 96-104.

¹⁰⁶ *Sefer ha-Bahir ha-niqra Midrashi shel R. Nehunya ben Haqana*. Reuven M. Margalit (Ed.), Mossad Harov Kook, Jerusalem 1978, 62.

Golem than in any other Kabbalistic school in the 13th century.¹⁰⁷ I assume that one of the members of this group was a certain R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, himself a student of Abraham Abulafia and one of the Kabbalistic masters of R. Isaac. In what seems to me to be one of the most interesting passages dealing with the creation of the Golem, he follows the affinity between human perfection of an intellectual brand, and the creation of a perfect Golem:

Once ... I, the young, was sitting in the company of advanced students, lovers of wisdom. One of them opened his mouth and asked me as follows: 'What is the difference between Creation [*Beriy'ah*] and Formation [*Yetzirah*]?' I told him: 'Why don't you ask also why Abraham our ancestor, called his book [by the name] *Yetzirah*, which consists of wondrous deeds, by the means of whom Rava created a man, and to R. Hiyya¹⁰⁸ and R. Hoshayah a three-year old calf has been created each time before the entrance of the Sabbath, and they were eating it during the day of Sabbath, and Jeremiah and Ben Sira created from it a speaking, wise and intelligent man, as I have explained above,¹⁰⁹ and why did he [namely Abraham] not call it the Book of *Beriy'ah*?' And he [the student] was not able [to answer me] and none of them answered me, since they did not know what is it [the answer?]. But I, the young,¹¹⁰ while I was speaking it, I have seen the correct rationale for it, which is as follows: You already know the secret of the [letter] *Yod* of the 'ABYA` and the secret of the [letter] *Bet*. Since the majority of sons of man have no power to endow a speaking soul, a fortiori an intellective soul, on the matter shaped either in the form of an animal or a beast or a bird or a fish or a reptile, even not in the form of man, [using the capacity of] the Book of *Yetzirah*, but only the animal and appetitive soul [alone], as our sages said Rava created a man and he sent it to R. Zeira etc, the book was called *Sefer Yetzirah* but not the book of *Beriy'ah*. The reason is that the animal and appetitive soul, which perishes with the death of the body, when the combination of the four elements is undone, stems from the intermediary world, which is the *Yod* of 'ABYA'. But the secret of the speaking [and] intellective soul is from the supernal world, which is the [letter] *Bet* of 'ABYA'. By saying the majority [of men] and not all [men] I intended to exclude Jeremiah the prophet, the disciple of Moses our master, peace on him, and Ben Sira and all those similar to them, who are very few, who attained a divine perfection, [so as] to create an animal, speaking intellective [being]. And if you shall argue that all the

¹⁰⁷ See Idel, *Golem*, 96-106.

¹⁰⁸ Instead of R. Hanina in the Talmudic passage.

¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, I did not find such a discussion in the extant manuscripts of, 'Otzar Hayyim'.

¹¹⁰ This is the way in which R. Isaac refers to himself even when he was old, and it intends to point to his modesty. See Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*. SUNY Press, Albany 1988, 87-88, note 43.

prophets ... were the disciples of Moses, our master, peace on him, so why did you mention Jeremiah in particular as a disciple of Moses? The answer is that you must pursue the Kabbalists in order to explain you the secret of the verse 'The Lord thy God will raise up to thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like me, to him you shall hearken'¹¹¹ and then you will understand, for sure, my intention. However, concerning Jeremiah and ben Sira alone I have received [a tradition] that they have drawn downward a speaking soul from the root of Bet of 'ABYA', that is the 'Alef of 'ABYA', by the dint of their great degree and the perfection of their soul, being able to [perform] this wondrous deed. The reason is that their degree reached that of Metatron, the Prince of the Face, and San[dalfon].¹¹²

R. Isaac of Acre presents the act of creation of the Golem in the frame of his peculiar Kabbalistic *weltanschauung*, which consists in the view that there are four worlds: the highest one, that of 'Atzilut, the world of emanation, referred by R. Isaac by the first 'A of the 'ABYA' acronym. The next one, the world of *Beriy'ah*, namely Creation, which is the world of the divine chariot, hinted at by the letter Bet. The third one, the world of *Yetzirah*, meaning formation, is the world of the angels, and corresponds to the letter *Yod* in the acrostics, and finally, the world of 'Asiyah, the lower world, which is to be understood as the world of Making.¹¹³

The discussion of the Golem is focused upon the capability of some mystics to induce the animal and appetitive soul into matter. This low soul stems from the world of *Yetzirah*, this being the reason, according to R. Isaac, that Abraham denominated his book by the name *Yetzirah*. This possibility is conceived as undisputable for a fair range of persons, including the Talmudic figures. However, we learn from the above passage, that a higher spiritual faculty can be induced by the very few, specifically Jeremiah the prophet and Ben Sira, and by "those similar to them". Consequently, some few elite have the access to the higher world, that of *Beriy'ah*, creation being able to draw down the speaking and rational soul. However, the Kabbalist assumes that those few may be able to reach even the world of 'Atzilut, as the phrase "Bet of 'ABYA' which is the 'Alef of 'ABYA'" implies. If so, R. Isaac asserts that it is possible to create a Golem that includes elements from all the three highest worlds, and so it seems to be reasonable to assume, also from the lowest world, which apparently would supply the matter of the Golem.

¹¹¹ Deuteronomy 18:15.

¹¹² Ms. Sassoon 919, 217; Ms. Cambridge, Genizah, TS. K 12,4 p. 22. More on this passage see Idel, *Golem*, 108-111.

¹¹³ See Gershom Scholem, "Hitpatehut Torat ha-'Olamot be-Qabbalat ha-Rishonim" *Tarbiz* 2 (1931), 415-442; *ibid.*, vol. 3 (1932), 33-66 (Hebrew).

The assumption that man can create using elements from all the four cosmic worlds is tantamount, as I shall try to show immediately, to the divine act of the creation of Adam. In other words, the above passage is an interesting response to the Genesis discussion of creation of man, as R. Isaac of Acre understood it. So, for example, we read in his commentary on the Kabbalistic secrets included in the Pentateuch, *Mei'rat 'Einayyim*. "The secret of creation of man [refers to] the speculative soul [*ha-neshamah ha-hakhamah*], which stands for ever. And the secret of his formation [refers to] the animal soul, which does not stand for ever ... And emanation and creation are more spiritual than formation."¹¹⁴

This last quote comprises, the doctrine of the above discussion of the creation of the Golem. The implication of the view of R. Isaac are, however, more radical than it appears at a *prima facie* reading. The assumption that the two masters were able to induce the spiritual element from the world of emanation implies that the magically created man has the highest spiritual capacity, which is not to be found, automatically, even in a normally created man. According to some Kabbalists, the highest soul is an achievement to be obtained by a mystical regimen *vitae*; while the conclusion that the created man by Jeremiah and Ben Sira is endowed with spiritual soul that is characteristic of a mystic, will be a far-reaching one, the sublime status of their creation is undeniable in comparison to the views of other authors who rejected the possibility that the Golem can even speak. What seems to be implicit here is a historiosophy of the creation of the anthropoid: the earlier masters, Jeremiah and his alleged son Ben Sira created a perfect man, speaking and intelligent, while the later masters created entities which are closer to animals.

This decline of generations is part of a wider historiosophy of this Kabbalist, who envisioned the period between late antiquity and late 12th century as one during which the Jews did not possess the knowledge of the true God. This claim is not original, and it seems that it ever berates a theory found in a passage of the early 13th century Geronese Kabbalist R. Ezra of Gerona. In both cases, a new theology, or theosophy invites the observation that prior to a certain period, Jewish thinkers ignored the precise details of the true theosophical doctrine. This assertion does not imply that the respective Kabbalists innovated the theosophies they back. This is certainly the case with the theosophy of ten *sefirot* as found in the writings of R. Ezra of Gerona, who was preceded by his master R. Isaac the Blind. With R. Isaac of Acre the situation is,

¹¹⁴ R. Isaac of Acre, *Mei'rat 'Einayyim*. Amos Goldreich (Ed.), (Ph.D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1984), 20 (Hebrew).

in my opinion similar, though the evidence is less explicit. He too inherited a theosophical theory which was previously unknown: that of the four cosmic worlds. I assume that this theory has been adopted by him, and perhaps also adapted, from sources with which R. Nathan ben Sa`adyah Harar was acquainted. It is in the collection of his Kabbalistic traditions that R. Isaac of Acre prepared, that the term 'ABYA` occurs for the first time. Since R. Isaac states in the lengthy quote adduced above quite clearly that he received a tradition related to causing the descent of the sublime soul, I assume that he conceived his discussion as retrieving the understanding of the creation of the Golem as found in the most accomplished Kabbalists: Ben Sira and Jeremiah. Indeed, in an interesting discussion dealing with Plato and Jeremiah, he resorts to the expression *Qabbalat Yermiyahu*, the Kabbalah of Jeremiah.¹¹⁵

Thus we may describe R. Isaac of Acre's approach as combining the views of R. Nathan ben Sa`adyah which emphasizes the importance of the basically intellectual transformation of the operator as a requirement for magical activity, with the Jeremiah-Ben Sira tradition. As part of this adoption and adaptation the possibility to reach the highest realm of the divine allows new possibilities insofar as both the mystical and the magical attainments of the Jewish masters are concerned: They are capable not only of cleaving to the 'Ein Sof, but also to operate on the intra-divine structure by drawing down power from the world of Emanation to the lower worlds. Interestingly enough, the same Kabbalist compares elsewhere the manner in which the anthropoid has been created: Rava created it without any utterance, while Jeremiah and Ben Sira did it by resorting to an utterance, *Ma'amar*.¹¹⁶ No doubt that also here the impact of the anonymous Kabbalistic version discussed above is conspicuous but, again, the interdiction to create the Golem has been obliterated. In other words: the composite nature of the anonymous discussions about the creation of the Golem first, and its interdiction at the end of those discussions, has been changed in favor of an unambiguous positive attitude. The very assumption, that a perfect anthropoid can be created implicitly, produces the assumption that it is licit to do so.

¹¹⁵ Ms. Moscow-Ginsburg 775, fol. 22a.

¹¹⁶ See R. Isaac of Acre, 'Otzar Hayyim'. Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1911, fol. 150b.

11. Golem and the Cosmic 'Adam Qadmon'

Moreover, the artificially created anthropoid comprises in himself the whole range of creation, and therefore it parallels the divine creation of the world. This understanding is consonant with a view, found in R. Nathan's traditions collected by R. Isaac of Acre, that the *macranthropos*, identical with the intellectual man, comprises the whole cosmos, including its spiritual facets, whereas the material man is the *microanthropos*.¹¹⁷ Moreover, this view corresponds to a tradition found in Midrash 'Avkkir, dealing with Adam whose creation began before the creation of the world, and ended after the accomplishment of the creation of the world, and the whole universe was included in him.¹¹⁸

The assumption that the artificial man includes in itself the whole universe, including the four cosmic worlds of the Kabbalists, is reminiscent of the theory of Lurianic Kabbalah, where 'Adam Qadmon, the Primeval Man, includes in itself the whole range of worlds, and is connected to the creation of an anthropoid'.¹¹⁹ As I attempted to show elsewhere, it is reasonable to see some elements of the Lurianic theory of 'Adam Qadmon as indebted to late 13th or early 14th century Kabbalistic material, found in a school with which R. Isaac of Acre was acquainted with, that of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid.¹²⁰ Thus, far from envisioning the creation of the Golem as a dangerous form of activity, or an elicit one, it becomes for some important Kabbalists a paradigm for the process of theogony: God, assumed the Kabbalists, creates 'Adam Qadmon just as the Jewish magician creates the Golem. In lieu of the attitude of the first stage of discussing the Golem, which are based upon the principle of *imitatio dei*, at least since the late 14th century *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, it is God who is imitating the creation of the Golem.¹²¹

Moreover, this creation of the 'Adam Qadmon in terms related to the creation of the Golem, is accompanied in many Lurianic texts by the assumption that this cosmic structure breaks as part of the theogonic process, the so-called *shevirat ha-kelim* – the breaking of the vessels – and it is the religious duty of the Kabbalist to help reconstructing this structure by means of performing the ritual so as to cause the return of the divine sparks to their primordial place before the break. We shall re-

¹¹⁷ See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 98 note 21.

¹¹⁸ See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1988, 117-118.

¹¹⁹ See Idel, *Golem*, 145-147.

¹²⁰ Cf. M. Idel, "Une figure d'homme au-dessus des sefirot (A propos de la doctrine des 'éclats' de R. David ben Yehouda he-Hassid et ses développements)" Charles Mopsik (Tr.), *Pardes* 8 (1988), 131-150.

¹²¹ See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 144-145.

turn to the question of theurgy in the next section. I see this development as part of a more positive attitude toward the creation of the Golem, which was indeed accompanied by a proliferation of more speculative and legendary treatments dealing with the Golem-*imaginaire*.

12. Two Modern Attitudes toward the Golem

The main understanding of the scholarly attitude to the Golem has been that its creation constitutes a competition with the divine and basically a dangerous and thus a dubious enterprise. This stand transpires from the interpretation offered by Scholem which had been adduced above.¹²² This view had a decisive impact on a famous poem of Borges, *The Golem*:

The rabbi gazed fondly on his creature
And with some terror.
How (he asked himself)
Could I have engendered this grievous son,
And left off inaction, which is wisdom?
At the hour of anguish and vague light
He would rest his eyes on his Golem
Who can tell us what God felt,
As He gazed on His Rabbi in Prague?

The reader of this marvelous poem may recall a famous Babylonian dictum, which asserts that "Man is the shadow of the god and men are the shadow of Man; Man is the King, who is like the mirror of the god."¹²³ Man, who stands here for the king as a representative of God and would have a semi-angelic status reminiscent of the divine glory in the later texts discussed above, is, therefore, the shadow while the men in plural, meaning the ordinary people, are shadows of a shadow. An interesting parallel to this proverb appears in the Coptic Three Steles of Seth, a Gnostic treatise found in Nag Hammadi. The aeons praising the feminine figure of Barbelo state: "We are [each] a shadow of thee, as thou art a shadow [of that] first preexistent one."¹²⁴ I would say that man and the creator of the Golem are perceived of as part of a vision of religion which may be simplistically described as *via passionis*.

¹²² Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 159.

¹²³ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Beacon, Boston 1969, 194.

¹²⁴ James M. Robinson (Ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library*. Harper & Row, New York 1981), 365.

The paradigmatic model found on high is the single most important entity, while the other, lower entities are shadows, feeble imitations of the supreme being and its actions. Borges' God is disappointed of his creature, the legendary Maharal, and the latter is disappointed by his creature, the Golem: a series of disappointments. Both creators have the impression that they deserted the more sublime activity, wisdom, for the sake of a lower form of activity, creation within the concrete realm. There is some sadness permeating the tone of Borges's poem, a sadness that reflects a Platonic attitude to art as a betrayal of a supernal paradigm. Meditation and wisdom are presented as more sublime alternatives to action. However, as seen above, according to some Kabbalists it is wisdom and spiritual perfection that allow the creation of a perfect Golem. A somewhat similar stand was embraced by another major figure in the 20th century, again following some of Scholem's views concerning religion in general and of the Golem in particular.¹²⁵

Already in his *Israel and Revelation*,¹²⁶ Eric Voegelin addressed the theology dealing with the 'death of God' in the thought of Hegel and Nietzsche, as pointing to a form of spiritual crisis. He elaborated much more on this issue in the context of the medieval version of the Golem legend as exposed by Scholem and I would like to succinctly address this treatment.¹²⁷ The gist of Voegelin's argument is that "the magic opus presupposes the murder of God."¹²⁸ Analyzing the view of *homo novus* in Marx and Nietzsche, he concludes that it is man who has made himself God.¹²⁹ Thus, he accepts Scholem's reading of the late Midrash and the *Commentary on the Tetragrammaton*, as anticipating Nietzsche, especially since it fits Voegelin's negative attitude toward magic as consisting in what he calls a metastatic approach. This secular reading of a Kabbalistic topic is reminiscent of Scholem's understanding of Franz Kafka as a secular Kabbalist,¹³⁰ and Jacques Derrida, following to a certain extent Scholem, understanding of a Hasidic stand as an atheistic approach.¹³¹

¹²⁵ See Moshe Idel, "Eric Voegelin's Israel and Revelation: Some Observations" Glenn Hughes & Stephen A. McKnight (Eds.); Geoffrey L. Price, *Politics, Order, and History: Essays on the Work of Eric Voegelin*. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 2001, 299-326.

¹²⁶ Louisiana University Press, Baton Rouge 1956, 465.

¹²⁷ See his "Science, Politics and Gnosticism", in: *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays*, William J. Fitzpatrick (Tr.). Gateway Edition, Chicago 1968, 53-73. See especially 56-60 and Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 181.

¹²⁸ Voegelin, *ibid.*, 64.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹³⁰ Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 12.

¹³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. Barbara Johnson (Tr.). Chicago University Press, Chicago 1981, 344-345.

13. Theurgy, Magic and Golem-Creation

By highlighting the importance of the passage of R. Isaac of Acre and his source in R. Nathan ben Sa`adya, and drawing some conclusions on other discussions on the Golem adduced above, my assumption is that both Talmudic masters and some of the Kabbalists were less concerned with the question of competition, which is a sort of problematic that entered the Jewish problematic of the Golem, as I attempted to show above, from a parable found earlier in an Arabic source, and was relegated to the margin or obliterated by some Kabbalists. Part of what I see as a much larger approach which attributed to man and his religious performances cosmic powers, what I designate as theurgy,¹³² the medieval discussions on the Golem addressed above are much less concerned with the perils which may be encountered by the operator but with his perfection. I proposed to conceive many of the mystical approaches in Judaism as following what may be called via perfectionis.¹³³ This emphasis on perfection of the creator who creates the Golem is found in at least two additional cases, which are reminiscent of Voegelin's claim about man making himself God. The first is the formulation of R. Isaac of Acre when he introduces the comparison between the creation of Rava and that of Ben Sira and Jeremiah:

You should know that a certain thing does not lose its plain sense. Indeed, because the true Kabbalist in matters of the names of the Holy One blessed be He, and their permutations, to permute and to revolve in order to invoke so as to be able to [obtain] his will, and to combine a name within another name,¹³⁴ letter to letter, word to word, he will [be able to] create heaven and earth and their hosts.¹³⁵

There can be no doubt that R. Isaac of Acre follows the pattern found in the Talmudic discussion of the anthropoid where the pure righteous are described as capable of creating worlds¹³⁶ immediately before introducing the story about Rava. The sequel dealing with the creation of a world, an anthropoid and an animal is found not only in the Talmud, but

¹³² See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 156-199; Charles Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la cabale, Les rites qui font Dieu*. Verdier, Lagrasse 1993.

¹³³ See Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*. Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1998, index, p. 446 under rubric via perfectionis.

¹³⁴ Shem ba-Shem. The numerical value of the consonants of these two nouns amounts in gematriah Ma`aseh Merkavah. See Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*. Menahem Kallus (Tr.). SUNY Press, New York 1989, 151-153.

¹³⁵ Ms. Oxford-Bodleiana 1911, fol. 150b.

¹³⁶ See BT. Sanhedrin, fol. 65b; Idel, *Golem*, 27-29.

also in a magical recipe extant in a manuscript to create a heaven.¹³⁷ Like them, R. Isaac does not doubt the possibility to really create heaven and earth if someone is properly introduced in the practices of combinations of letters and divine names. In other words, an accomplished mystic did not have any problems to perform magical acts. Indeed, as R. Isaac of Acre puts it explicitly at the end of the long quote dealing with the Golem discussed in section 10 above, Ben Sira' and Jeremiah attained the rank of the well known couple of archangels, Metatron and Sandalfon, which are described in many sources as closely connected to the last sefirah, Malkhut. Thus, the belief in the possibility of the transformation of the mystic into a supernal power is the explanation for his capacity to draw down the highest soul from the divine realm. In addition, this Kabbalist mentions the perfection of the soul, which may be either an innate quality or, more in Abraham Abulafia's vein, an achieved one. Let me adduce another quote, which illustrates the innate perfection of the Kabbalist in the context of creating a Golem. In the anonymous *Sefer ha-Ne`elam*, written by a contemporary of R. Nathan and R. Isaac of Acre, sometimes at the end of the 13th century perhaps in Castile, the Kabbalistic significance for the interdiction to kill is formulated as follows:

Man is comprised of all the spiritual entities, and he is perfect [containing in himself] all [the divine] attributes, and he was created with great Wisdom... for he comprises all the secrets of the [divine] chariot¹³⁸ and his soul is linked therein, even though man is in this world. Know that, unless man would be perfect [containing] all the forces of the Holy One, blessed be He, he would be unable to do as He does. And it is said that Rava created a man, and if the righteous wished they could create worlds.¹³⁹ [All these] demonstrate to you that there is a great supernal power in men, which cannot be described, and as man possesses such a great perfection, it is not just to destroy his form and his soul from the world. And one who kills a person, what is the loss he brings about? He sheds the blood of that [man] and diminishes the form,¹⁴⁰ that is, diminishes the power of the Sefirot.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ See Ms. British Library 752, fol. 17a; Ms. British Library 753, fols. 66a-67a; Ms. Firenze-Laurenziana Plut. 44.16, fol. 4a; Ms. Bologna, University Library 2914, fols. 178c-181a.

¹³⁸ Merkkavah, which means in this context the sefirotic realm.

¹³⁹ BT. Sanhedrin, fol. 65b; on the context of this passage and its significance, see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 165-166; Idel, *Golem*, 28-31.

¹⁴⁰ Namely the divine forms.

¹⁴¹ Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 817, fol. 73b. On this work see Asi Farber, "On the Sources of Rabbi Moses de Leon's Early Kabbalistic System", in: *Studies in Jewish Mysticism Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, Joseph Dan & Joseph R. Hacker (Eds.), Jerusalem 1984, 67-96 (Hebrew).

Let me start with the assumption that human soul is still related to the supernal realm while man is alive here below. This formulation seems to reflect the Plotinian psychology of the natural connection of the human soul to the universal soul even during its sojourn in this world and capable to perform wonders by the dint of this affinity.¹⁴² I had adduced a “strong” passage, in which the concept of man’s perfection is quite evident: he possesses both the form of the divine world, the ten sefirot, and the divine powers inherent in them. In a manner reminiscent of the text quoted from R. Isaac of Acre about the possibility of angelization, here the divine is conceived of as present within man, or at least some of them, from the very beginning. Thus, perfection is either innate or achievable by someone who knows how to achieve it. Thus, a sense of being fallen, imperfect, competing with God might have been alien to those among the Jewish mystics who espoused the radical theurgical views, in immediate vicinity of discussions of the topic of the Golem. The Golem is, therefore, at least in some cases, part of what may be described as *via perfectionis* which allows and perhaps even encourages this form of activity. The shadow simile adduced above, has been understood in many Kabbalistic texts in quite a different manner, in which God was described as the shadow of man.¹⁴³

The last text is representative of many Kabbalistic schools and, in a more moderate manner, even of some Rabbinic discussions.¹⁴⁴ I would like to emphasize the historical aspect of this issue: numerous orthodox Jewish authors – if we may use the term orthodoxy for those periods of time at all – who believed in God, did not refrain from exposing strongly metastatic concepts. Death of God is, presumably, the only single option they never envisaged, despite all their metastatic impulses. On the contrary they may betray efforts to enhance divine energy.¹⁴⁵

Thus, we may ask the question whether the two possibilities suggested by Scholem when describing the relationship between the operators and God: as emulation or antagonism, indeed exhausted the gamut of relations the Kabbalists themselves envisaged in the precise context of creating a Golem. Both emulation and antagonism, different attitudes

¹⁴² See the bibliography adduced below, note 147.

¹⁴³ See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 173-181.

¹⁴⁴ On Rabbinic and Kabbalistic material see recently Yair Lorberboim, *Imago Dei: Rabbinic Literature, Maimonides and Nahmanides*. (Ph.D. Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1997) (Hebrew); On Kabbalistic theurgy see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 173-199; Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la cabale*.

¹⁴⁵ See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 181, 184-191; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 19; idem, “The Kabbalah’s Window of Opportunities” 1270-1290”; *Me’ah She’arim, Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*. E. Fleisher et al. (Eds.), The Magnes Press, Jerusalem 2001, 191-192.

as they indeed are, share nevertheless an important common denominator: they assume a very significant and even an unbridgeable distance between the two persons or at least a certain awe of the lower toward the higher. However, as seen above, it seems that at least some Kabbalists believed in the existence of different forms of bridging the gap between the humans and the divine. Forms of mystical union or communion, or angelisation and apotheosis, were not alien to their worldview and religious experiences.¹⁴⁶ For them, what may appear to be an extraordinary performance that breaks the laws of nature, is perhaps no more than attaining a higher nature to which the lower nature is intrinsically subordinated.

The perfection of the soul mentioned in the two texts above is reminiscent of the views stemming from Avicennian thought and widespread in some circles in the Middle Ages, that by the cleaving of the pure soul to the supernal or cosmic soul, the former is capable of performing miracles.¹⁴⁷ We had seen a similar view in the quote from *Sefer ha-Ne’elam* discussed above. The emphasis I propose to put on spiritual transformation and unitive experiences is, in my opinion, related to the importance of techniques occurring in many places in Kabbalah. Lets us not forget that Golems were imagined to have been created by following certain techniques, many of whose details are reminiscent of spiritual techniques used by ecstatic Kabbalists.¹⁴⁸ I would suggest that just as the mystic is striving for being in touch with the divine, a tendency I call the apotheotic vector, he may also want sometime to translate his achievement within the mundane realm in the form of a magical operation: the descending vector. If this is the case, at least in some instances, the operator does not conceive himself as competing with the divine, neither does he just emulate God: he is actualizing the divine potentiality inherent in him, the soul or the intellect, or the rank he achieved by following a certain discipline or technique. To be sure: I do not assert

¹⁴⁶ See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 1-32; idem, *Natan ben Sa’adyah*, 261-307.

¹⁴⁷ See Georges Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age*. Mouton, Paris 1962, 243-246; 385-387; Aviezer Ravitzky, *History and Faith, Studies in Jewish Philosophy*. Amsterdam Studies in Jewish Thought 2, Gieben, Amsterdam 1996, 154-204, especially for Kabbalah 172-173; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, 63-65.

¹⁴⁸ See Idel, *Golem*, 96-104; For the importance of techniques in Jewish mysticism see idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 74-111; idem, *The Mystical Experience*, 13-71, idem, “*Unio Mystica* as a Criterion: ‘Hegelian’ Phenomenologies of Jewish Mysticism”, in: Steven Chase (Ed.), *Doors of Understanding, Conversations in Global Spirituality in Honor of Ewert Cousins*. Franciscan Press, Quincy 1997, 305-333; Natan ben Sa’adyah, 113-163; *Enchanted Chains* (Forthcoming).

that the conjunction between these two vectors is automatic neither is it necessary.

However, this affinity plays an important role in many forms of Jewish mysticism, where a model I called “mystical-magical” played a significant role both in the inner life of some leaders and in their approach to their followers.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, in many cases, magical activity is presented as following a mystical attainment, which itself enables the creative activity. Though the conditioning of creation by attaining a state of mystical union, *devequt*, seems to be historically independent of what we have seen above in ecstatic Kabbalah it seems possible that this view found its way to the thought of the famous Maharal of Prague, to whom the creation of a Golem had been attributed by a late legend. I did not find any historical reason for such an attribution, a fact which should not prevent us from listening to what this influential author had to say about the creation of the anthropoid. In his commentary on the *Sanhedrin* passage he wrote:

When he [Rava] was purifying himself and [then] studied the divine names in the Book of *Yetzirah*,¹⁵⁰ he was thereby cleaving to God, blessed be He, and [then] he created. But he [the artificial man] lacked the faculty of speaking, since his [Rava's] power was not so great to bring a speaking soul in man, so as he [the man] would do like him, since he is a man and how can he create [something] similar to himself, just as it is impossible that God, who surpasses everything, to create one [God] similar to Him.¹⁵¹

Here the concept of imperfection is giving the tone of the entire discussion. Even God Himself cannot create a being similar to Him, much less so man. Some is able to create only something that is lower than himself. The clue for Rava's creation is the spiritual purity of the *Amora'* and subsequently his experience of union with God. The prerequisite of purity can be easily understood on the background of requests for purity found in the Talmudic passage and in the book of *Bahir* that of union seems to be influenced by the explanatory addition of the anonymous commentator on the *Bahir* passage. So far the similarities between the Maharal, the commentator, and R. Nathan ben Sa`adya are clear.

However, they differ as to the possibility to produce a precise replication to man or God. The commentator evades the problem. However, just before the above passage, the Maharal discusses the talmudic state-

¹⁴⁹ See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*. SUNY Press, Albany 1995, 45-145.

¹⁵⁰ For Rava's study of *Sefer Yetzirah* see above the traditions depending upon the late Midrash.

¹⁵¹ Yehuda Liwa Ben Besalel, *Hiddushei 'Aggadot Maharal me-Prague*. Benei Beraq, 1950, III, 166.

ment, which argues that the Righteous are capable to create worlds, explaining it by the “total cleaving to Him”, which ensures this possibility, as the anonymous commentator of the book of *Bahir* that was quoted above did.¹⁵² Therefore, at least in principle, the Maharal negates the possibility to achieve the creation of the perfect Golem, notwithstanding the spiritual perfection of the mystic who attained a unitive state, or a state of *devequt*, when he may create a world.¹⁵³

The two Golem-legends to which Voegelin had access via Scholem's study on the subject, represent a small percentage of the vast literature on the Golem in the Jewish speculative body of writings. The apprehensions of possible implications of magical actions because of fear of murdering God are not representative of the corpus of discussions on the Golem, but reflects an uncritical acceptance of Scholem's view of the topic, as discussed above. In other words, a stark opposition between theurgical and magical actions on the one hand, and religion on the other hand, does not stand the examination of the much of the extant material insofar as Jewish mysticism is concerned.¹⁵⁴ The growing importance of religious acts which were conceived to have an impact on reality including God Himself, as documented succinctly above, is part of a large development, representing a main challenge to the description of the evolution of religious consciousness as portrayed by Voegelin or to the manner in which Borges understood religion.

It is only later on, in the stories about historical figures who allegedly created Golems, basically since the last decades of the 16th century, that the growing body of the Golem become a potential danger for its creator.¹⁵⁵ This line of development of the theme of the Golem follows different interests than that of late antiquity texts and many of the Kabbalistic ones. The theological danger of misunderstanding the creators of the Golem as the Creator disappeared, and the Golem became dangerous because of its unrestrained growth, which may imperil even its human creator. It is the imperfection of the magician and of his artifact which are in some later Jewish texts, the main source of danger, not his perfection, or that of the Golem, as seen in some medieval texts discussed above. This later line of development reached European culture

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ On the concept of *devequt* in the Maharal see Byron Sherwin, *The Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague*. London, Toronto 1982, 17-19, 122-141.

¹⁵⁴ See Moshe Idel, “On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Magic”, in: Peter Schaefer & Hans G. Kippenberg (Eds.), *Envisioning Magic*. Brill, Leiden 1997, 195-214.

¹⁵⁵ See Idel, *Golem*, 207-212.

in the form of Marry Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.*¹⁵⁶

Inspecting the constellation of ideas concerning the Golem which developed over the centuries, and even when analyzing material found in the same school, (like Hasidei Ashkenaz for example), we may better understand the variety of trends which inspired the thought of the later generations. My basic assumption is that there were different traditions dealing with the creation of the anthropoid, which reached some Jewish circles to the latest in early 12th century, and influences the formulations of various recipes and treatments, many of them formulated by the Hasidei Ashkenaz. Attempts to portray an unilinear history with a clear-cut 'beginning'¹⁵⁷ constitute poor modes of understanding complex literatures, and they are prone to become even poorer when they are combined with historicistic approaches. Thus, for example, though ibn Wahshiyya wrote somewhere in the East, the reverberations of his views, or that found in his sources, were felt among Jews only elsewhere, in medieval Europe, and only some centuries afterwards. It is mainly in the Ashkenazi elite that the religious problem created with the impact of the Ibn Wahshiyya, was dealt with more than among Jews living in Islamic countries.

¹⁵⁶ On the latter's dependence on the concept of Golem for his robots see Emily D. Bilski, "The Art of the Golem", in: Emily Bilsky (Ed.), *Golem danger, deliverance and art*. The Jewish Museum, New York 1988, 66.

¹⁵⁷ See my critique of the historicistic approach to beginning in my "On Binary 'Beginnings' in Kabbalah-Scholarship", in: *Aporematha, Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte*, Band 5 (2001), 313-337. See also note 46 above.